This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

HD WIDENER
HW HH74 8

Aug. 38.5

Harvard College Library.

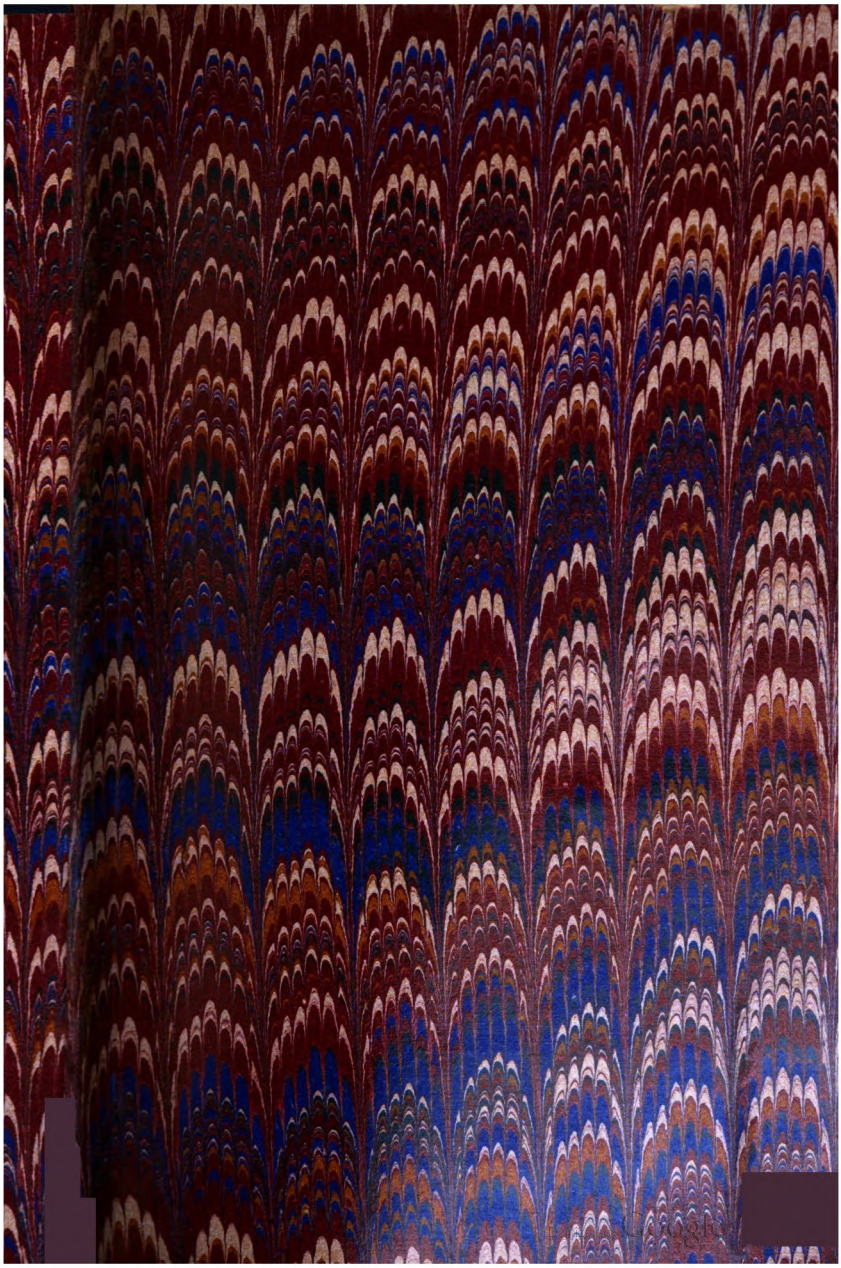
COLLECTION OF BOOKS ON ANGLING, ETC.

GIVEN BY

JOHN BARTLETT,
(A. M. 1871.)

Nov. 17, 1892.

Digitized by Google



Digitized by Google

BY STREAM AND SEA.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

BY STREAM AND SEA.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

BY STREAM AND SEA.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

BY STREAM AND SEA.

A BOOK

FOR WANDERERS AND ANGLERS.

By WILLIAM SENIOR

("RED SPINNER").

London:

CHATTO AND WINDUS, PICCADILLY.

1877.

(*All rights reserved.*)

Digitized by Google

Ang 38.5

Harvard College Library
17 Nov. 1892.
Gift of
JOHN BARTLETT
of Cambridge

"There is a pleasure in the pathless woods,
There is a rapture on the lonely shore,
There is Society, where none intrudes,
By the deep Sea, and music in its roar.
I love not Man the less, but Nature more,
From these our interviews, in which I steal
From all I may be, or have been before,
To mingle with the Universe, and feel
What I can ne'er express, yet cannot all conceal."

CHILDE HAROLD.

Digitized by Google

To

MY WELL-REMEMBERED FRIENDS

OF THE

WHITEFRIARS CLUB,

IN MEMORY OF MANY HAPPY HOURS.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

CONTENTS.

PART I.

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	A Hertfordshire Valley	3
II.	Modern Yarmouth	20
III.	A Spring Ramble by the Itchen	35
IV.	Charles Kingsley in the Saddle	49
V.	Over the Mendips	59
VI.	Out of the Chalk	68
VII.	Walton's River	92
VIII.	A Moorland Legend	107
IX.	In the Peak Country	126
X.	Notes at Brighton	139
XI.	Winter at Hazelbarn	153
XII.	Memories of the Neva	165
XIII.	Autumnal Rovings	185
XIV.	Christmas Eve in a Punt	214

Digitized by Google

PART II.

MY OCEAN LOG.

	PAGE
First Entry—From Newcastle to Port Said ...	233
Second Entry—The Suez Canal and Red Sea ...	246
Third Entry—Flying Fish and their Enemies ...	263
Fourth Entry—The Straits of Malacca	276
Fifth Entry—At Singapore	286
Sixth Entry—Strange Fish	298
Seventh Entry—The Great Barrier Reef ...	304

Digitized by Google

BY STREAM AND SEA.

PART I.

MISCELLANEOUS PAPERS ON ANGLING AND RAMBLING.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

BY STREAM AND SEA.

CHAPTER I.

A HERTFORDSHIRE VALLEY.

AMONG the many tributaries which feed old Father Thames during his proud career through a drainage basin estimated, I believe, at over six thousand miles, commend me, in the double capacity of wanderer and angler, to the Colne. It is within easy reach of town, it is very fairly stored with fish, and it traverses interesting and, in some portions of its course, exquisitely beautiful scenery. How many Colnes there may happen to be in this country I know not; my Colne is not, however, the feeder of the Calder which receives the foul discolouration of the West Riding cloth factories, nor the stream of that name which runs through the north-eastern part of Essex to Colchester, nor the little Coln (so often spelt with a final *e*) that rises in the Cotswold Hills, and gives some occasionally worthy trout fishing at Fairford. My Colne is that lovable stream which brightens a goodly section of pastoral Hertfordshire,

Digitized by Google

which for two miles and a half keeps boundary between Herts and Middlesex, and which in the last fourteen miles of its length mostly marks the border-line between Bucks and Middlesex, as the Lea across the county marks the border-line on the eastern side.

Rising near historical Hatfield, the Colne soon begins to receive additions right and left, its infancy being by this reason much shorter in duration than that of most streams; very quickly

> "The struggling rill insensibly is grown
> Into a brook of loud and stately march,
> Cross'd ever and anon by plank and arch;
> And for like use, lo! what might seem a zone
> Chosen for ornament; stone match'd with stone
> In studied symmetry, with interspace
> For the clear waters to pursue their race
> Without restraint."

One of the earlier branches of the Colne, the Verlam, is considerably larger than itself, and this is the stream which passes by Lord Bacon's Gorhambury and the ancient shrine of St. Alban's. By Watford the Colne flows through flat marshy meadows, overlooked by the London and North-Western Railway, and busily peopled in winter-time by grey plovers and many passing feathered visitants, and touches the quiet old-fashioned town of Rickmansworth, where we may find it convenient to halt at the head-quarters of our Hertfordshire Valley.

From this centre you may wander away into the woods to the north, into Moor Park, once the habitation of Cardinal Wolsey, James Duke of Monmouth, and Lord Anson, and now the country house of Lord Ebury; or into Rickmansworth Park, where you may pass a long delightful summer's day under the shade of grand avenues of trees,

Digitized by Google

none daring or caring to make you afraid. Or to vary your experience you may take the canal towing-path, and trudge over its loose gravel until you heave a sigh of thankfulness in Uxbridge, of which it was once said that the only thing to be noticed respecting it was the house in which the Commissioners appointed to arrange the little differences between Charles Stuart and his bristle-backed Parliament sat fourteen days in conference, and never arrived at a satisfactory conclusion after all.

The first sight of Rickmansworth from the window of your railway carriage is a very pleasant one, the taper spire of the parish church rising out of the trees as one always likes to see it rise in country places, where ecclesiastical rooks and episcopal jackdaws like to claim a share in the benefits which Church and State bestow upon the land. There is a rare colony of these garrulous belfry haunters at Rickmansworth, and sometimes the approach of the train, though it is the slowest railway travelling in the kingdom, sends them wheeling over spire and trees in noisy clouds.

Very peaceable and—if I might say it without offence of a town in which I have spent many happy hours—very humdrum is Rickmansworth. Of course, like other old-fashioned places with a history, it has had its excitements. Take, as a specimen, the matter set forth on a timeworn black-letter document in the British Museum, bearing date 1525 and beginning: "Be it knoun to all cryste people which joyeth in theyr hartes of ye power of God shewed by his own precyous body i fourme of brede in ye chyrche of Rykmersworthe where wretched and cursed people cruelly and wylfully set fyre upon all ye ymages." This was the head and front of the offending, and the cardinal of the period liberally offered indulgences to whomsoever would aid in restoring the cremated effigies. Rickmansworth

Digitized by Google

Church in these days of grace is, however, most carefully tended; its churchyard is a finely shaded God's-acre, and over the walls of the building luxuriant ivy is climbing upwards and onwards.

Rickmansworth possesses good inn accommodation of the comfortable, old-fashioned kind; but there is an unpretending little tavern down by the bridge specially dear to a fraternity of anglers who make it their head-quarters. Their room overlooks a back stream running swiftly from a weir at the bottom of the cabbage garden, and day and night, winter and summer, feast days and fast days, they are soothed by the musical plash of the water rippling along under the balcony which compasses the entire front of this homely Fisherman's Home. Fishing-gear fills the corners, mantelpiece, and sideboard. Upon the wall of the Waltonian sanctum there hangs a floridly coloured representation of the catching of a salmon. The angler is seen struggling with a rod that by all rules of perspective should be four hundred and fifty feet long; and he is of the type of sportsmen so dear to a certain class of artists—a swarthy gentleman of the gipsy type, cigar in mouth, and hair most ravishingly curled. But somehow the picture tells its story admirably: it gives you an accurate idea of a fine salmon river, and the country through which it runs and the sort of tableau that an angler winching in an exhausted salmon, an attendant with gaff outstretched, and an odd slain fish or so neatly deposited among flowers and grass under a rock, would make.

Some such pictorial furniture as this is as necessary to an angler's inn as the Herring prints are to the coaching and marketing tavern. We have not, alas! many honest angling inns left to us—I mean the inn as to which it was no mere figure of speech to talk of snow-white sheets smelling

Digitized by Google

of lavender, and the like—some such inn as Shenstone, no doubt, had in his mind when he wrote the dreadful heresy—

> "Whoe'er has travell'd life's dull round,
> Where'er his stages may have been,
> May sigh to think he still has found
> The warmest welcome at an inn."

From the doorway of this anglers' tavern at Rickmansworth you look out upon the canal. The straight stretch of sluggish water at eventide reflects the sunset, and catches the parting glints of daylight. A canal is not *per se* an object of beauty, but a bridge or two, fringes of sedge and bulrush, cattle reflected in the water, and trees overhanging here and there, take much from the hard and fast lines of the artificial channel. It is not an effort of imagination, therefore, to represent this prosaic canal as a salient feature of the winsome picture spread before us from our standpoint, and the general effect is heightened by the broadening of the water at the jutting point where the Colne runs into and across it, under the high Chinese-looking bridge up which the barge horses have to climb. In the meadows to the right of this bridge there are notice-boards warning delinquents with angling propensities against the penalties of the law, and offering rewards to any member of the community who will detect and expose the poacher.

A small rustic bridge further on, under overshadowing trees, conducts to the waterside, margined for a while with an osier bed. Beyond the further bank the distant houses of the town peep from beneath the greenwood, and the road may be traced by its fringe of trees. Shorthorns feed in the verdant meads; bees hum in the air; swallows hawk over the fields and pursue their prey to the surface of the water, from which they can whisk it without a splash.

Digitized by Google

It is a common expression that you can look upon a scene like this without tiring; but not more common than true. The poor women, married and single, who toil in the rag-mill up the road, the labourers returning with the expiring day from fallow and fen, the country folk, driving backwards and forwards, generally slacken speed or stop on the crest of the bridge that they may once more take in the panorama with which they have been for many years familiar; and every night the angler, as he steps out to smoke his pipe of peace, will be sure to find groups of natives looking over the coping into the water below, looking at nothing particular, but hugely comforted nevertheless by the occupation.

The barge life of this Hertfordshire valley cannot long escape the notice of the frequent visitor. It is a phase of life not at all creditable to a Christian land and a missionary-loving people. The bargees are sottishly ignorant, and treat their womenfolk as if they were savages. Being continually on the water, and continually on the move, in our midst but ever passing, on shore yet on water, no one seems to think of them. They belong to no parish, and have no responsibilities; neither does any teacher or guide feel responsibility towards them. True it is that there are exceptions to the rule; some of the barges are well-regulated cottages, whose little aft cabin is clean, painted with some idea of artistic adornment, and the abode of a family literally born and bred within its shadowy recesses. But these are rare exceptions indeed. To the anglers' inn there is a lower region where the barge men and barge women call for refreshments when passing through the lock hard by, and he who would prefer not to see the face of womankind disfigured by every kind of bruise, or to hear horrible blasphemies rolling from a

Digitized by Google

woman's tongue, had better give that lower region a very wide berth.

Ask the landlord of the inn how many drunken persons he has rescued from a watery grave close to his stable door; ask the coroner what a tale of dead is yielded every year by the canal. And if you would learn further of the morality, and ignorance, and habits of the barge people, start straightway to the Paddington basin and make full inquiries. The condition of these hardworking men, women, and children, for whom we should feel much pity, has been improved, no doubt; but they are still deplorably benighted.

Whatever man may be, every prospect pleases. Follow the Colne through the meadows, fight your way through the myriads of gnats and midges that rise from the osier leaves: mark the merry water-rat plunge from his niche in the muddy bank, the water-wagtail rise from the island of weeds in the middle of the stream, the reed-sparrow scared away in momentary alarm, the dabchicks down the water which will have disappeared long before you reach them, the deep swims where the lazy roach keep company, the gravelly scours and sandy shallows upon which the dace and chub wait for the drifting insect, the bubbling weirs streaked with effervescing water and flecked with spotless foam, the ford leading to the village, the anglers' huts, the villagers' kitchen gardens, the creeper-covered houses, the clean shaven lawns of the gentry and the humble tenements of the poor, the village on one side and on the other copses and rising woods in which game find cover and romping children gather flowers, blackberries, nuts, hips and haws, in their respective seasons—mark these as the surroundings of the Colne as it winds through rich meadow-land to the Roaring Ford, a little beyond which it once more finds an outlet into the canal.

Digitized by Google

The remainder of the Colne valley may be not less picturesque than that we have left behind, and to which we must presently return, and it possesses historic interest. The mansion of Harefield—we are now in Middlesex with Buckinghamshire across the river—was visited by Queen Elizabeth, who halted there as the guest of Lord Keeper Egerton, and the new play of "Othello" was performed there by Shakespeare's own company, with Shakespeare himself, in all probability, in the cast.

This was in 1602, and thirty years later the Countess Dowager of Derby had for her guest a man who was in other ways associated with the locality—the poet Milton. For her he wrote his "Arcades," which was represented at Harefield by some noble persons of her own family. Milton was a frequent visitor at Harefield while he lived at Horton, and lower down there still, I believe, is to be seen the cottage (at Chalfont St. Giles) hired for the blind poet by Quaker Ellwood when the inhabitants of London were driven afield by the Plague. It is pretty well authenticated that the greater portion, if not the whole, of "Paradise Regained" was written in this retreat. Before this time, however, the famous mansion at Harefield had fallen victim to its own hospitality, for the gay Sir Charles Sedley being one of the guests, and reading in bed, set fire to his bed-furniture, and thus burnt the house down.

Historical, too, to anglers is the Colne through the use made of it by Sir Humphrey Davy in "Salmonia." The worthy inventor of what is still *the* Safety Lamp has been often laughed at by scientific naturalists, but for all that we ought to be thankful for the illness which, rendering him, to use his own words, "wholly incapable of attending to more useful studies, or of following more serious pursuits," gave us his charming little work as the amusement of his leisure

Digitized by Google

hours. It was upon the Colne at Denham, midway between Rickmansworth and Uxbridge, that his four *dramatis personæ* gave up twenty-four hours to the delight of an angler's May-day. In its essential points the description written in 1810 serves now:—

"This is really a very charming villa scene, I might almost say a pastoral scene. The meadows have the verdure which even the Londoners enjoy as a peculiar feature of the English landscape. The river is clear and has all the beauties of a trout stream of the larger size—there rapid and here still, and there tumbling in foam and fury over abrupt dams upon clean gravel, as if pursuing a natural course—and that island with its poplars and willows, and the flies making it their summer paradise, and its little fishing-house are all in character; and if not extremely picturesque it is at least a very pleasant scene, from its verdure and pure waters, for the lovers of an innocent amusement."

The record of the actual sport obtained by this quartette is very tantalizing to readers in these later times. Coming upon the fish when they had forsaken cad and minnow for the dainty drake or luscious alder fly, they killed and slew. Fish under two pounds were returned to the water, and monsters up to seven pounds were either lost or bagged. Alas, for the days that are gone! Occasional large fish are even now killed by minnow, and more rarely by fly, but the Colne trout, though not extinct, is only represented by patriarchal specimens, which have probably wandered from tributaries to take up positions which they hold until poached or taken by legitimate captors. During the pike season a large trout, or perhaps a couple, may be taken with live bait, or a brace in the early spring may fall to the share of a skilful minnow fisher; but the glory of the Colne as a trout stream has long since departed.

Digitized by Google

Not so many years ago the Rickmansworth fishery was one of the best in the country. It was carefully preserved by a limited club of gentlemen, who paid a high price for their sport; but the sport was worth the paying for, and the angler was seldom indeed sent empty away.

One morning the keeper walked down the meadows to perform his daily inspection, and saw a burly speckled object circling slowly by the side of the stream. It was a trout, too sickly to dart away at the approach of footsteps. A few yards further there was another fish *in extremis;* then another, and others. In short, along the entire margin the magnificent trout, objects of his most constant watchfulness, were dead and dying by the hundred, and by the hundredweight. The man has often told me that he wept like a child at the sight. His employer went to law with the mill-owner above Rickmansworth, whose iniquities had caused this dire destruction, and through some technicality lost the cause. This portion of the river is still preserved as a subscription water, and I know of none that surpasses it for heavy and plentiful roach, for large dace that afford good sport to the fly-fisher, and for chub. The pike run small, though they are of extra quality. The poachers in the neighbourhood run large, and they also are of extra quality —bad quality.

No better excursion can be made to behold our Hertfordshire valley scenery at its best, and at the same time to visit one of the show-places of the neighbourhood, than to Cheneys, just over the Buckinghamshire border, five miles from Rickmansworth. The drive is through delightful country, along a high road overlooking the course of the River Chess, which joins the Colne near Rickmansworth. You ascend from that town by a steep street, which soon brings you into high ground, among the hedges and trees

Digitized by Google

and fresh country air. Rickmansworth Park is to the right, with its cool shady avenues and grand forest trees, and there is rolling upland to the left, stretching away in well-cultivated undulations towards Royal Windsor.

A July drive along this route lives bright in my memory. It had rained hard during the morning, and the sun had, as if in a fit of sulkiness, refused to show himself for the remainder of the day, though the showers had ceased. Nature was therefore in tears, but tears which disfigure human beings become the hedgerows and grassy banks, cornfields and tree-branches. In the glittering drops which gently hung upon the leaves there was no trace of grief or sadness, but rather a suggestion of joy and infinite content. How, too, the birds warbled on every hand, piping in all the bushes, answering each other in the tree-tops and making the woods jubilant with song! And what woods they were! I saw them on the return journey next day, mottled with the gold of a fierce sunshine, but now they were clothed in sober mood that accorded well with their stateliness.

Towards Lowdwater the trees are very fine, and their naturally noble aspect is heightened by an abundant admixture of larch, Scotch and other firs. Shapely beeches (not that the beech is ever other than shapely), lofty elms, sturdy oaks, showy chestnuts, lift up their heads, rising with the ground from the little river and covering the opposite slope with a mass of variegated foliage.

Sometimes you forget the woods in the nearer objects—in the flowering vetch, in the waving corn, bright with scarlet poppy-heads, the blue blossoms of the succory (so often mistaken for the corn-flower proper), and the modest little lesser bindweed, that, entwined and nestled among the stalks, makes bold in the absence of sun-glare to open its sweet countenance. To many a cornfield is a cornfield,

Digitized by Google

but, like the poet's primrose, "it is nothing more;" to the careful observer who has time to lean over a five-barred gate and look into the wheat a cornfield is a glorious garden of wild flowers.

On this July day the wild flowers shone in their full glory. What the fields lacked the hedges supplied. They were drawn up on either side of the road like troops at a review, as if for the sole purpose of gratifying me, who drove slowly between the lines, inspecting their many-coloured uniforms and accoutrements. It is said that there are no fewer than twenty varieties of wild rose in these islands, and there were a good many representatives in this Hertfordshire hedge, in different stages of bloom and in every shade of delicate colouring, from the blush that is almost white to the blush that is almost red. There, too, exquisitely beautiful as it always is, was the bonny woodbine, climbing always from left to right, and the white convolvulus obeying the same law. The cream-coloured and odorous elder blossoms were there in large masses, and the common bramble with its red stems and manifold flower-spangles held its own right bravely.

> "Though woodbines flaunt and roses glow
> O'er all the fragrant bowers,
> Thou need'st not be ashamed to show
> Thy satin-threaded flowers."

But we must drive onwards would we not lose caste in the eyes of the driver, who does not understand why his horse should be held in when the road is good and the steed willing. Luckily, he is one of those drivers who, while not chatting too much, is desirous of telling his customers many interesting things about the country—how, for example, the splendid mansion behind the cedars yonder was built by So-and-so, the great tobacconist, who owns the

Digitized by Google

entire estate and has worked wonders upon it—how Mrs. Blank, in the cottage, has gathered so many bushels of cherries already, and will be able to gather as many more—how, coming down the hill which we are approaching, Farmer Stubbs, keeping a loose rein, came to grief and broke his neck—how this fine stretch of furze-covered land is Chorleywood Common, famous for splendid cricket-matches promoted by one of the moving spirits at Lord's, who lives in the house—how, at the further extremity of the common, there are the kennels of the old Berkeley Hunt—how much had been given for the fleeces of the sheep, which in their newly shorn condition seemed anything but comfortable after the rain.

There ran a stoat across the lane into the plantation, and here pounced a hawk upon something fluttering over the richly blossoming pea-field: now we pass a group of rustic boys examining the rusty gun of a companion who is neglecting his bird-keeping, or a row of old almshouses suggestive of Elizabethan times, or a number of model cottages with choice flower and vegetable gardens at sight of which the driver launches out into loud praise of the Duke of Bedford, upon whose estate we are, and who, he says, lets the handsome brick houses for eighteenpence a week.

"By George! sir," he says, touching up the mare with the whip, "I should like to live there myself." And he might do worse.

Down in the valley, in a kind of sleepy hollow, surrounded by charming scenery, but very much out of the world, are Sarratt Mills, on the Chess. Descending the steep lane by which the mills are reached, you have a comprehensive bird's-eye view of the valley, the woods, and, the stream. There are trout in the Chess, and, to let

Digitized by Google

you into a secret, the article strapped to the umbrella is a fly-rod, and I have received an invitation to see the paper-mill and make acquaintance with paper-mill trout. I have spoiled so much paper in my time that I resolve to inspect the mill as a matter of duty to conscience; I need neither argument nor resolve with the trout, being always ready for them. From the excitement which the arrival of a stranger causes among the workpeople, I am led to the conclusion that life at Sarratt Mills is regular, not to say monotonous; it must of necessity be so to the ladies whom I espy over the garden hedge, in broad-brimmed hats and white gauntlets, busy at the flower beds, and for whom there is absolutely no society near at hand.

A mill-head for angling purposes is a very different affair from a mill-tail. The former is quiet sometimes to stagnation; the latter characterized by perpetual motion. The Chess in the one fishable meadow at Sarratt takes the form of a mill-head, and it was like my inveterate ill-fortune that I should find it smooth and quiet as a pond. A trout would be nothing less than idiotic to take an artificial fly under those circumstances. But was there ever an angler yet who would be deterred from at any rate making an attempt, whatever the chances might be? The foreman of the mill, into whose hands the hospitable proprietor delivered me, thought it the worst of taste on my part that I did not at once accompany him into the mill. He was a practical Yorkshireman, and could not imagine why I was not as enthusiastic about his business as was he himself.

After the honeysuckles, wild roses, woods, cornfields, and hedgerows, I am bound to say the paper-mill did not strike me as being particularly attractive. The first process I found was quite appropriately termed "dusting;" two very dirty young women were tending a revolving circular

Digitized by Google

wire cage in an atmosphere of dreadful dust which might represent the sweeping of all the London garrets. In another room grimy girls were cutting up barge canvas, potato sacks, tarpaulins, ropes, and other materials of the marine store class. In another the "hands" were sorting the rags—soft pink rags for blotting-paper, and white rags for white paper, blue and other colours being artificially produced. Upstairs dressmakers' clippings and black odds and ends of various materials were, after being boiled and rinsed with lime-water, prepared for the soft whity-brown paper in which madame's drapery purchases are wrapped. Out of the stinking mass seething in the boiler would by-and-by come the wholesome paper bags in which your confectioner sends you your cracknels. Then came the breaker-room, where, by an ingenious drum-washing apparatus, rags were broken and cleansed. Next it was shown how the rags were reduced to pulp, or as it is technically termed, "half-stuff."

By this time the choking dust and uncomfortable rags had been left in the rear, the atmosphere was sweeter, and the workpeople were much more wholesome in appearance. The vats were full of yeasty-looking pulp, which, having passed through a strainer, bore a resemblance to clean curds. The pulp requires much refining before it leaves the vats, and the material at each stage assumed a fairer quality, until it descended to the machine-rooms, where what seemed to be a number of printing presses were at work. Here the pulp flowed in a smooth stream along a shoot, ran over several miniature weirs, refining as it travelled, until it spread out and became an almost impalpable sheet over a tightly strained wire bed. Dryer and dryer it became, and at the last weir the sheet went between two massive rollers of felt,

Digitized by Google

to all intents finished paper, though rollers and cylinders remained for drying and calendering.

The paper-mill trout, it was evident even to the foreman, could be kept waiting no longer. It was but a short length of water at one's disposal, for the Chess is most rigorously preserved, and the boundary fence of the Sarratt Mill land was not more than two hundred yards off. The fish refused to respond to any manner of temptation. Long line, short line; wet fly, dry fly; fine cast, coarse cast; flies dark and light, large and small, shared the same uniform fate. In such case there is nothing lost by suspending operations and making a few quiet observations. In other words, spike your rod, lie down on the grass (if it be not too damp), and watch. So I advised myself, and so I did.

When everything was quiet the fish began to move about, evidently returning from the deeps into which they had been scared to the banks under which they had been originally lying. They arrived singly, and with no little commotion took up each its favourite position. Giving them leisure to settle down into confidence, I made ready, and having previously marked the particular bunch of grass near which the fish lay, dropped the fly upon it, whence it tumbled gently into the edge of the water. A suck from the trout, a delicate but firm jerk from the fisherman, and the mischief was accomplished. The fish leaped clean out of the water, and frightened numbers of which I had had no previous suspicion away from the margin. But he was well hooked, and all his plucky fighting could not save him. In about an hour quietness again reigned supreme, and a second trout was deluded into the fancy that my hare's ear was a dainty morsel accidentally falling in his way. It was a modest bit of sport, but it fitted well into a long day

Digitized by Google

which had included a succession of enjoyments as miscellaneous as the subjects of this chapter.

And Cheneys still remained. The Sleepy Hollow of Sarratt was left to its seclusion, and the high-road once more gained. Cheneys, about a mile and a half farther on, is a placid, eminently respectable village, commanding the loveliest woodland walks. Attached to the church is the mausoleum, where lie many members of the Russell family, among them Lord William, who was beheaded in Lincoln's Inn Fields. No one goes to Cheneys without seeing the remarkable monuments and faded banners of the mausoleum; the fine old Elizabethan Manor House, with its cool quadrangle and dark-leaved ivy; and the veteran oak, planted, it is said, by the fair hand of good Queen Bess herself. Pursuing the valley upwards Latimers and Chesham are reached, the Chess rising near the latter place. The lower part of the river has been spoiled by mill-poisoning, but between Sarratt and its source it maintains its high reputation as a trout stream.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER II.

MODERN YARMOUTH.

FOR one I do not hesitate to admit undying affection for the really ancient town of Great Yarmouth. It is not because St. Nicholas, the friend of the mariner, is its patron saint, and the building bearing his name the finest parish church in England. It is a matter of very little moment to me whether, in the year of our Lord 495, Cerdicus, the warlike Saxon, and Henricus his son, did or did not come unto those yellow sands. It may be recorded, but one need not be particularly moved by the fact, that for eight hundred years herrings and Yarmouth have been, at home, if not abroad, synonymous terms. We may, on the whole, take it as a matter of actual occurrence that the Dutch and Fleming refugees, persecuted out of their own countries, settled here. Very little am I moved by, though not denying, the historical associations of the place, including as they do a Cromwell, a Nelson, or even a Winthrop Mackworth Praed, who once sat for the borough.

These, though matters of passing interest, are not provocative of affection. I love Yarmouth because, over and

Digitized by Google

above other towns within my knowledge, it moves most slowly with the galloping times, and because, if you take it at the proper time—and that is not in what the common world would call its "season"—it still retains that ancient and fish-like smell which so admirably becomes it. Those "rows," to the number of one hundred and fifty, which Dickens in his own happy manner likened to the bars of a gridiron, were surely made expressly for the reception of kippers, the development of red soldiers, and the due honouring of a superfine bloater, made to hold in lingering embrace the perfume of cured and curing fish, and thereby to cut off from the inhabitants the remotest chance of pretending that they do not owe their fame to, and keep up their existence by, the delicious and plentiful little *clupea harengus*.

Once upon a time* I took the reader to sea with the herring fleet, and brought him, after one night's absence from his feather bed, safely ashore, with a profitable cargo of silver-sided fish. On this occasion we may confine ourselves entirely to Yarmouth, albeit these November days are dark and drear and short. All the summer visitors, the seaside holiday-makers, have deserted the lodging-houses. The beach, so lively and crowded during the dog-days, is mostly left to local children and native dogs. Yarmouth, in short, is itself again, and wholly given up to the harvest which the bounteous ocean invites it to come and win in the teeth of howling gales and foaming seas. Nobody, I presume, who is not a gross partisan, would venture to say that Yarmouth is the kind of town a photographer in search of the beautiful would make the subject of views for an art-album or patent stereoscope.

---

* "Waterside Sketches," pp. 188–206.

Digitized by Google

Mistress Peggotty, who for her part was proud to call herself a Yarmouth bloater, told little Copperfield that Yarmouth was, upon the whole, the finest place in the universe. Copperfield had not till then held that opinion, you may remember. Quoth he—

"It looked rather spongy and soppy, I thought, as I carried my eye over the great dull waste that lay across the river; and I could not help wondering, if the world were really as round as my geography-book said, how any part of it came to be so flat. But I reflected that Yarmouth might be situated at one of the poles, which would account for it. As we drew a little nearer, and saw the whole adjacent prospect lying a straight low line under the sky, I hinted to Peggotty that a mound or so might have improved it; and also that if the land had been a little more separated from the sea, and if the town and the tide had not been quite so mixed up, like toast and water, it would have been nicer."

Approaching the town from inland, from the far-reaching flats over which the North Sea is once supposed to have freely ebbed and flowed, you must agree with the faithfulness of Master Copperfield's portraiture; but, seen from the water, Yarmouth has a certain quaint picturesqueness of its own, very pleasing to the eye that rests upon it when the windmills on the low sandhills are revolving, when the autumn sun smites the housetops with his ruddy hand, when the pierheads are crowded with amateur codling-catchers and spectators, who gather there at the rate of twelve human beings for every fish hauled up, and when the heavy black boats on the beach are busily performing their duties as mediums between the fishing-vessels and the carts waiting to bear away their produce. It is worth incurring the disappointment of an unsuccessful two hours' fishing in an

Digitized by Google

open boat thus to see Yarmouth at its best, as you will see it rocking a furlong or so from shore, while your long line of a dozen or twenty hooks reposes on the bottom, in wait for cod, whiting, eel, or gurnard.

Better, however, will it be for the student of modern Yarmouth to stroll, with observant eye and ear, into the quarters where the staple industry of the place is in full operation. Begin at the bridge and walk by the river side towards the fish-wharf. The double avenue of trees and the gay flowers which the inhabitants of the upper part love to cultivate, and, loving, cultivate successfully, give a colour of home to the neighbourhood. It reminds you of some scene in Holland, as many other things in Yarmouth will do before you have finished your perambulations. The harbour is crowded with small vessels, luggers, smacks, and dandies, that will before to-morrow be off for the fishing-ground. In the shop and tavern windows the advertisements, in keeping with the surroundings, invite you to become the purchaser of some strongly built craft, with all her superior stores and materials, including ever so many tons of the best pig-iron ballast, the communication invariably ending with an inventory in which a boat-hook, worth ninepence, perhaps, has a line of small capitals all to itself.

The ship-chandler's shops are in great request now; the little wooden midshipmen at their doors have been newly varnished and gilt; the shop-boys run hither and thither with blocks, chains, cordage, and sails. Boys who are not engaged in these pursuits, pass with spoils of fish suspended by a piece of twine; even the policemen and railway porters coming from the wharf have their fishy morsels dangling from their hands. There is a tramway, but not for passengers; only for cargoes of fish. Herrings are the first consideration here. For them also have been built those handy little

Digitized by Google

two-wheeled carts, drawn by plump, fast-trotting cobs not to be beaten in any other English town, and from which may be any day selected half a dozen greys and iron-greys fit for presentation to an Arab chieftain.

Here at last is the fish-wharf, a fine straight quay with a substantially built market facing the newly arrived vessels—of say fifteen tons average. The tug has just brought in three of these fishing-boats; having been relieved of their cargoes these crafts will, without the delay of an hour, go out of the river, make full sail to the offing, and cast out their drift-nets before nightfall. The skipper and crew care nothing about the fish after they have been deposited on the wharf, and they have nothing to do with their sale. The wholesale fish-market, to the very doors of which the vessels are brought, was built to remove many of the inconveniences formerly experienced under the old system of landing the herrings on the beach—a system, be it remembered, which, owing to the monopoly it fostered on land, much better pleased the local fishermen than the newer free trade regulations under which the Scotch and French fishermen are able to compete so vigorously with them. The beachmen, finding to a great extent their occupation gone, naturally complain of the change, and it is no consolation to them to know that it is for the public good.

Before the fishing-vessel has fairly brought up alongside the market wharf she is boarded by a number of men who are not, as their eager gestures and impetuous language would signify, about to murder the crew and scuttle the ship; they are "tellers" on the look-out for an engagement, and the large panniers they carry are not Welsh coracles, but "swills" into which the fish in the hold will be counted—each swill, for the accuracy of sale, to contain five hundred fish. The wharf is covered with swills,

Digitized by Google

and a bell is being rung to call the buyers together. The auctioneer sometimes, as when the fishermen have been too successful, may have a difficulty in obtaining an auditory; but that is a rare case. He is a man of few words, and those few he wastes not. The late George Robbins would have mourned over his matter-of-fact descriptions.

"What d'ye say," he asks; "shall we begin with five pounds a last?" A last means thirteen thousand two hundred fish, and by the rules of the trade herring are sold by the last. But there is no response until a comfortable-looking gentleman offers fifty shillings. Him the auctioneer evidently knows, for he familiarly and chidingly remonstrates with him for his meanness.

At this juncture there is an uproar in the rear, a fight between a sailor and a teller in the shed, and the auctioneer is left absolutely alone until the dispute is settled by the ignominious thrashing and retreat of the landlubber. Eventually the bidding begins at three pounds, and proceeds at advances of five shillings, until, amidst some laughter, the comfortable-looking buyer who had offered fifty shillings buys the last for five guineas. Prices vary according to the supply of fish, and vary therefore immensely. Not long ago forty-five shillings per last was the highest price that could be fetched; at another time herrings had been so scarce that the auctioneer dared not sell more than a hundred fish at a time, and then at eight shillings per hundred, or forty pounds a last. The briskest sale-time is when the earliest vessels come into the river: at such crises everybody works double tides to catch the trains and get the fresh fish into the markets while they are saleable. The auctioneer, it may be added, is a man of some consequence. He provides the swills, and is responsible for the money produced by sales; in return he gets a good commission, and they do say about

Digitized by Google

Yarmouth that the auctioneers make as much out of the herrings as any.

Lying on the wet floor of the market-house are groups of cod, taken by accident in the drift-nets, or by the single hook-lines thrown casually by the sailors overboard for the chance of a stray fish. These cod are arranged in lots of from eight to five, the fish averaging perhaps six pounds each, and they, too, are submitted by auction. Who says that a cod has no expression? It may not have a fine open countenance for the portrayal of delicate emotions, but expression it undoubtedly has. Here is one with gaping mouth and expanded gills, meaning, as any one may observe, blank astonishment. Its neighbour, by the curl of its tail, compression of the jaws, and determination of the eye, informs us that it died in a state of impotent rage. The little three-pound rock codling, meekly stretched out with fins demurely smoothed down and lips modestly parted, is a touching picture of resignation. Another fish must, from the turn of his half-closed eyes and funnily displayed fins, have been a humourist in whom the ruling passion was strong in death. The cod, thus examined, would seem to be, on the whole, a rather genial fellow, very eligible, if such pursuits obtain down yonder, for evening parties and the like. Not so the wicked, leering conger, whom every man and boy in passing kicks and execrates. The brute is eight feet long, and sullen and murderous every inch of him.

But the sale is beginning, and—hear it not, London housekeeper, to whom the boiled cod's head and shoulders served up with oyster-sauce, lemon, and horse-radish (pray never forget that pungent garnishing), is not a trifle—half a dozen fish are knocked down for two-and-ninepence. A worthy Gray's Inn solicitor, keeping me company, waxes so excited at this richness that he buys half a dozen lots in succession,

Digitized by Google

and sends them to London by the next train for distribution amongst his friends and clients. The natural inference in town is that he has caught them himself, and as he takes no pains to explain otherwise he is now renowned in club and chambers as the finest long-shore fisherman in the profession.

The Yarmouth girls engaged in the herring trade work very hard while the season lasts, but they need not swear so much. Some of them, I fear, are a terribly rough set. They are sitting about outside the wharf on barrels, or logs, or baskets, eating their dinner with fishy hands, and shouting unrepeatable jokes to the men: coarse in feature, slovenly and dirty in dress, wearing heavily hob-nailed boots, they are a caricature on "the gentler sex." The tavern hard by is full of them drinking at the bar, and who shall blame them when there is no other apparent accommodation? It would be a boon in the interests of charity and decency alike to provide in the neighbourhood of this prosperous wholesale fish-market a workwoman's hall, where wholesome food and shelter would be provided for them at a reasonable rate. These women might, of course, take their meals amongst the fish and salt in the sheds where they work, but, as one of them suggested to me, they prefer a change of scene during their dinner hour. But it must not be supposed that this is a fair type of all the women who are employed in the herring trade; they are only the "residuum." When in full work in the curing sheds, a skilful and industrious woman can earn a pound a week, and many are as respectable in reality as in appearance. On the Denes yesterday there were three or four girls repairing nets; they wore fashionable chignons, black silk dresses, smart hats, and no doubt represented the aristocracy of the Yarmouth workwomen. What a pity it is that these

Digitized by Google

picklers, packers, and curers do not wear some such neat costumes as those in fashion amongst the French fish-women!

By turning into the yard to the left, we may watch the process of herring pickling. The fish brought here, it should be explained, are the herring which have been salted at sea; that, at least, is the technical expression. In reality, the fish are simply sprinkled with salt as they are thrown into the hold. By this process the fishermen are enabled to remain afloat for days together, and this a run of ill luck renders a disagreeable necessity. The fortunate ones are those who, sailing out of harbour to-day, are able to return to-morrow morning with a cargo of fresh herrings, which are despatched as such with all speed. The fish which the women occupying our shed are manipulating are first washed by men, then passed on to the female hands who pack them into barrels with Lisbon salt between the layers, and finally nailed in by a cooper who is ready with the caskhead. Fish thus treated are shipped to various parts of the United Kingdom, especially to Scotland and to the Continent, and are intended for almost immediate consumption. Some of these lasses, I have said, are dreadfully rough: it is an expression I cannot recall, nor dare I say that their converse, their jests, or their songs are in any sort of fashion womanly; but they are thoroughly good-tempered and overflowing with animal spirits, and there is room for hope that they are not so bad as they seem.

The classic bloater is, or is supposed to be, a fresh fish faintly cured. It is a popular error to suppose that it is a distinct species, a kind of upper class fish, born, bred, and educated in exclusive shoals. It is only a herring of the best quality, and it may be selected from the mass. Nothing is more foreign to a generous man's nature than to play the

Digitized by Google

Iconoclast with a household god, and it would ill become me to shake the British nation's faith in her savoury bloater. But it is said that numbers of the so-called Yarmouth B. come from Ireland and Scotland, and are doctored and palmed off to confiding breakfast-tables as the real original article. When every purchaser of a herring insists upon its being a bloater, a Yarmouth bloater, and a hard-roed Yarmouth bloater, it is clear something must be done to keep up the supply. However, let us confine ourselves to what is being done under our own observations.

The "herring office," where the fish are converted into bloaters, is a very singular place. Upon the ground floor the herrings recently arrived from the wharf are shot out of the swills upon the stones, transferred by great wooden shovels into a huge tub, thoroughly washed, and passed on to women—a much better type than those working about the wharf and in the ruder sheds—who thread them through one of the gill covers upon a long slender lath called a "spit," which accommodates five-and-twenty fish. The spits are then taken up into the smoke-room, a lofty, barn-like apartment, full of dark-coloured frames and beams from floor to roof. The spits, charged with herrings, are placed horizontally in niches which receive the ends of the stick, the tiers extending to the ceiling overhead. The only aperture in this dusky room is in the centre of the roof, the great object being, when the drying process begins, to "draw" the smoke. The room being filled with tiers, containing sometimes as many as a hundred thousand fish, small wood fires—of oak, if possible—are kindled over the stone floor, and maintained without flame. The uncemented tiles above, and the one opening in the roof, promote a free draught, while the smoke from the oaken logs gives a fine colour to the fish. For certain markets where a particular colour is demanded, ash

Digitized by Google

billets are substituted for oak. A few hours in the smoke-room are sufficient for a bloater, and the lower spits are used for that description of article. The fish higher up are left to dry according to the will of the curer, the last to be removed coming down as veritable red herrings.

We have now seen the fresh herring sold and despatched, the pickled herring lightly salted and barreled, the bloater and red herring cured to a turn in the smoke-room, but there yet remain the kippers. The veteran boatman and fisherman pretend to know nothing about this process of kippering, which they regard as a new-fangled notion that will ruin the country if persisted in. Probably they would think more kindly of it had it not been of Scotch origin. But there it is, increasing in importance every year. It employs large numbers of thrifty, homely women, mostly Scotch. The best quality of fish must be selected for kippering; no salt is used; the herrings are most carefully cleansed, and delicately and artistically smoked. Mr. Buckland, in a recent Report on our East Coast Fisheries, estimates that a thousand lasts of herring per year are now required for kippering.

Yarmouth, however, does not live by herrings alone. Trawling is an equally important branch of the local trade. When the bloom is gone from the herring season the boats refit, and, under the generic name of smacks, spend the winter in trawling, a much more hazardous occupation than drifting, and altogether different in its nature. The drift-net entangles the shoal swimming near the surface; the trawl sweeps the bottom. The one captures herrings, with a very occasional mackerel or cod in the meshes; the other brings up the more remunerative sole, haddock, plaice, turbot, brill, and whiting. It is stated in Mr. Buckland's interesting little Blue-book that the North Sea trawling-ground covers, according to Yarmouth calculation, 50,000,

Digitized by Google

and according to Grimsby calculation, 130,000 square miles; that is to say, it extends from the North Foreland to Duncansby Head in the Pentland Firth, and from the coast of England to that of Norway. While, forty years ago, there were but two Yarmouth vessels engaged in trawling, some four hundred boats now sail from the Yare. In this matter Yarmouth and Gorleston have prospered at the expense of Barking, whose fleet of smacks was transferred to the more convenient harbours of Norfolk. The trawlers composing the North Sea fleet are good sea boats, well found, and manned by excellent seamen, who dare much and do much that is never known to the world. The smacks remain at sea from six weeks to two months at a time, and, as the voyages fall in the depth of the winter, the close of every season brings a sad tale of missing boats and men. There was a memorable gale in November, 1863, which in one night destroyed seven Hull trawlers with all hands, and disabled twenty other boats.

The trawling fleets are sometimes composed of vessels from various ports; but there are a few wealthy merchants who own entire fleets of from sixty to eighty smacks. An admiral of the fleet is appointed by popular election, and from his vessel signals are made directing the movements of the fleet. At night the orders are given by "flare-ups"—flashes of light visible, like meteors, for miles over the watery waste. According to the number of flare-ups the fleet goes about, or lies to, or takes in fishing-gear.

Passing along the beach just now, I noticed a handsomely built and smartly rigged cutter speeding towards shore, light and swift as a sea-bird. Simultaneously you might have observed unusual commotion in one of those lofty watch-towers on the esplanade, which are never deserted. The cutter is not a gentleman's private yacht, as

Digitized by Google

may be supposed from its general appearance, but one of the swift carriers running between the fleets and the Yarmouth beach with the produce of their trawling. The signalman caught sight of her through his telescope some time since, and long before the cutter brings up as near the shore as is consistent with safety the carts will be drawn up along the shore and the men standing by to ply the "ferry-boats"—the heavy black barges to which reference has been previously made.

The cutter brings a variety of fish, carefully packed for the distant markets to which they are to be despatched. To appear on the fishmonger's slab in good condition fish should be taken from the water alive—not battered to death in the trawl-nets—and immediately packed. Fish caught in the trawl are known in the trade as either "prime" or "offal," the former comprising soles, turbot, brill, and dorys, and the latter gurnards, plaice, haddocks, skate, etc.; and the "prime" are honoured with better packing-cases than their coarser brother captives.

The carrier, arriving by night or day (in the darkness he announces his coming by the useful flare-up, and with such accuracy that the signalman at once knows the particular vessel challenging his attention), will certainly find everything ready for the reception of his cargo, and in a couple of hours the fish-train, a special, if necessary, will be on its way to Billingsgate. The cutter, therefore, which we have this afternoon watched tearing through the waves at ten knots an hour, will have been the means of supplying fresh stores of fish to the London retail dealers by breakfast time to-morrow morning. Some of the carriers run straight from the fleet to London, and there is a London steamer engaged in the Dogger-bank trade. A steamer tried, however, in Yarmouth for the same purpose a year or two since, was not

Digitized by Google

found to answer. The use of ice is now thoroughly understood on board these smacks, and a brisk shore industry is carried on while there is ice upon the adjacent broads; though Norway ice, brought to Yarmouth ice-houses in white Norwegian ships, is preferred.

The soles and other favourite flat-fish seem to be getting scarcer and scarcer every year, and competent judges attribute the declension to the wholesale destruction of small fry on the spawning-grounds near the Dutch coast. A Gorleston smack-owner told Mr. Buckland that he saw hundreds of vessels trawling in the great fish nursery of the North Sea, which, twenty miles in width, extends from the German coast to the Texel, and destroying every night at least a hundred tons of small fish. From the North Foreland far into the North Sea there are numerous fishing banks well defined on the smacksman's charts, and productive of the finest soles, which are found there (the water being deep) in the coldest weather in immense numbers. The Dutch trawlers are great sinners against fisherman's law.

The Dutch smacks being of smaller draught than ours, the fishing is conducted too near the shore whenever it may be done with impunity. The Germans, by the effective argument of an ever-present gun-boat, take care of their coast fisheries by allowing no trawling inside nine fathoms of water. At any rate, the spawning-grounds ought to be protected; and Mr. Frank Buckland will have done excellent service by the forcible manner in which he has called the attention of the Government to evils that English, Germans, and Dutch alike are peculiarly interested in remedying.

The smacksman toils hard for his living, amidst perils of which we, who are snugly housed ashore, little wot. The operation most dreaded by him is the conveyance of the packages of fish from his smack to the carrier cutter. The

Digitized by Google

transfer is effected in the smack's little boat, and frequently in most dangerous seas. Many a man and boy have perished in the performance of this hazardous duty.

A ramble through Yarmouth—fish-market, Denes, curing-houses, rows, streets, market-place—will always be appropriately terminated by a final stroll along the marine parade, piers, and jetty. After a long spell of north or south winds, there are not far from a thousand sail lying in the safe anchorage of the roadstead. It is computed that 50,000 vessels annually pass and repass within sight of shore, and a sea-scape so animated is always worth studying. Yonder dark, heavily laden brig, voyaging southward, is a collier carrying coals from Newcastle to London. Close behind her follows a round-nosed barque, listing to starboard more heavily than the wind justifies; she is a Baltic timber ship whose cargo has shifted, as such cargoes will, during yesterday's gale. The screw trading steamers leave behind them long lines of foam below, and long lines of black smoke above. A mist steals gradually over all, and each object dissolves into a shadow and is no more seen. The inshore fisherman and the amateur anglers wend their homeward way, with their strings of codling and whiting, and Yarmouth ashore settles down to the quiet leisure of evening at the precise moment when Yarmouth afloat settles down to a night's hard, and let us hope remunerative, work.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER III.

A SPRING RAMBLE BY THE ITCHEN.

A SPRING ramble, do I say?

To be sure, by all law and precedent, there cannot be any doubt that this is spring-time, for we are in the first week of April, the month when the sealed caskets of nature silently and gradually unlock in beautiful response to warm sunshine and soft showers. At least so used it to be; but the grand vernal movement for which we have hoped so intensely during the murderous blasts of a severely protracted winter seems still reluctant to gladden our eyes in its full April measure. The farmers and gardeners do not object to a little reasonable backwardness of season, for anything in the shape of forwardness, you may generally take it, with most kinds of vegetation, as with men and women, boys and girls, is unsafe, and not to be desired by those who are wise enough to look to ultimate issues. Yet it would be pleasanter, as we sally forth, were we not cut and slashed so mercilessly by the bitter wind, and were we able to realize even in a faint degree all the sweet adjuncts with which poets invest April skies and spring landscapes.

Digitized by Google

But (fortunately, who shall question?) it is not for mortals to command in these things; not one of us by taking thought can add another bud to the boughs, or develope another flower in the hedgerows.

Masses of slate-coloured clouds roll over the fine old city of Winchester as I wait in a porch for the carriage which is to convey us to Itchen-side, and—miserable luck!—the hailstones storm us in volleys, making the windows of the cathedral over the way rattle again, and covering the green grass of the churchyard with tiny dancing hop-o'-my-thumbs which speedily are gone for ever. The carriage cometh not; up the street and down the street we look, and still the chariot wheels delay their coming. It is but a step across to the cathedral, and we may spend a profitable quarter of an hour there. Moreover, it is a spot of peculiar interest to the angler.

The antiquarian loves Winchester Cathedral because of its hoary historical associations with the period when the White City of the Downs was fortified by the Romans, who established there their College of Priests, and upon its site —or near enough to it for argumentative purposes—erected their temples of Apollo and Concord. The connoisseur of architecture loves the low-towered church for the wonderful combination of many schools which it represents. Rebuilt with crypts by Ethelwold, after the rude handling of Danish invaders, Bishop Walkelyn introduced nave and transepts in massive Norman style. This was the Walkelyn whose tower is supposed to have fallen in horror at the burial in consecrated ground of His Majesty William Rufus, who, you may remember, having been sent to his last account by Master Tyrrell's arrow in the forest yonder, was brought hither in a charcoal-burner's cart. Then we have the Right Reverend Godfrey de Lucy's Early English, and famous

Digitized by Google

William of Wykeham's substitution for the Norman of the severely beautiful Perpendicular. Cromwell had a word or two to say, necessarily, about the decorations of our cathedral, but, as well-preserved specimens of all the above styles remain, though amidst many incongruities, it may be well observed that to the student of architecture Winchester Cathedral is an object of admiration.

The angler, though I will not do him the heinous injustice to hint that he cares for none of these things, remembers the cathedral for another reason. He passes by Walkelyn's Norman work in the north transept, the corner by which, descending to the crypt, may be inspected the most ancient architectural features of the structure, and makes his way towards the eastern side to the little chapel, to which the name of Silkstede is given; but its singular wirework and other peculiarities are of secondary consideration, for here lie the bones of dear old Izaak Walton.

The good angler was a great traveller for his time. There were few parts of England unfamiliar to him. He fished many rivers, north and south; in Worcester Cathedral he buried his wife, "a woman of remarkable prudence and of primitive piety, who was blest with general knowledge, true humility, and Christian meekness," and who was therefore a worthy mate of the man who could write no higher praise of Dean Nowel, of St. Paul's, than the words—"This good old man was a dear lover and constant practiser of angling as any age can produce; and his custom was to spend, besides his fixed hours of prayer . . . . a tenth part of his time in angling, and also . . . . to bestow a tenth part of his revenue, and usually all his fish, amongst the poor that inhabited near to those rivers in which it was caught."

Walton's son Izaak was a Canon of Salisbury Cathedral, and Walton himself, dying during the hard frost of 1683 in

Digitized by Google

Dr. Hawkin's house in Winchester, was buried in Prior Silkstede's chapel. Tread softly, for here is the flat stone which points to the master's last home, and thus commemorates it:—

Here resteth the body of
MR. ISAAC WALTON,
Who dyed the Fifteenth of December, 1683.

Alas! he's gone before,
Gone to return no more.
Our panting breasts aspire
After their aged sire,
Whose well-spent life did last
Full ninety years and past.
But now he hath begun
That which will ne'er be done.
Crowned with eternal bliss,
We wish our souls with his.

Votis modestissic flerunt libert.

And still the hail peppers the streets as we come out into the light, and yet the angler, having finished the pilgrimage to his hero's shrine, is left lamenting at the non-arrival of the promised vehicle. Well, well, if we may not ride we can walk to our hearts' desire! The day is not favourable for angling, but it may be turned to good account for rambling purposes by the side of the limpid Itchen. And there can be no better guide than H——, who loves its trout with paternal affection, who is known by every Hampshire angler, and remembered by many a Winchester College boy after he has gone forth unto the ends of the earth to make the fish of distant waters feel the disadvantages of the lessons taught him in the art of fly-making and trout-catching. This worthy is a well-known citizen, and known far and wide.

The old man has fished the Itchen for thirty years, and,

Digitized by Google

acquiring water as fast as it came into the market, he is now the proprietor of several miles of fine trout fishing. Happily I find him amongst the stuffed fish, flies, and angling stock in his shop in the peaceful square, not far from the City Cross, and induce him to don his fishing-boots, take his rod, and be my guide during the afternoon. But he decisively warns me to expect no sport, for the Itchen trout have a keen sense of the proprieties, and at this time of the year will not rise after two of the clock. They do not trouble themselves, however, seriously about the icy wind, and are not necessarily disconcerted at the hail; but as to times and seasons in other respects they, like wilful women, will have their own way.

By the bridge at the bottom of the town there is a stretch of water free to the public, and the private soldiers from the garrison sometimes of a summer evening come down and mingle with the civilians in whipping the river. If these free fishers used the fly only the sport would be much better, for the stream is of such a nature, and in such a position between the upper and lower waters, that the largest fish are to be found there. But all sorts of unfair means were at one time employed to capture the trout; and perhaps, after all, we should not be too hard upon a poor fellow who knows that a three-pound trout is lying under a certain bend in the bank, and that he will be three shillings the richer if he can transfer it to his bag. So he tries worm and minnow, as he has a perfect right to do; but he attempted a process locally known as "snatching," which was reprehensible and not to be endured. These body-snatchers lashed three large hooks together back to back, and weighting them with a bullet or piece of window lead, threw the apparatus over the fish, and fouled it if they could. It was a long time before the keepers could under-

Digitized by Google

stand why so many mutilated and murdered fish were found, but at length the ruinous cause was discovered to be "snatching." Happily, a bye-law was unearthed under which the snatcher could be brought under the hand of the police, so that the Itchen anglers during succeeding seasons reaped the benefit of a strict enforcement of the penalties in such case made and provided.

The Itchen about Winchester is* the only portion which is within the reach of the angler who is able and willing to pay for his sport, and there is no river in England where the terms are fairer and the probabilities of moderate sport better. You may, for a trifle per diem, purchase the right of fishing the lower waters, where large fish roam; or you may secure advantageous terms by taking weekly, monthly, or yearly tickets. The upper water is a ten-rod and ten-guinea subscription fishery, and there the trout are more numerous, though not, as a rule, so heavy. These particulars I mention to assist any brother angler who, wishing to know how best to spend that holiday which gives him release from care and toil, is hampered and too often disappointed by not knowing where to go. The higher parts of the Itchen are most strictly preserved by the landowners, and hence there exists a common impression that the whole river is beyond the grasp of an ordinary individual. Winchester is but sixty-seven miles from London, and if a London angler takes the earliest and latest trains he may enjoy a long day's hard work with his fly rod by the side of a well-stocked trout stream and amidst lovely pastoral scenery.

Yesterday, as I can vouch from actual observation, one of the subscribers between ten and three o'clock caught seven brace of fish, weighing twenty pounds; four and five brace

* Referring to the season of 1874.

Digitized by Google

are not at all uncommon takes in the upper water, and all fish under three-quarters of a pound have to be returned to the river. The gentleman who yesterday was able to exhibit this superb dish of finely conditioned trout pleaded guilty to having had fifteen losses; that is to say, the fish were rising short, and escaped with a prick. This the angler must expect on a cold April day; but it is better only to touch a rising fish than whip without a sign from morning to night. Sensitive trout fishermen humiliate themselves sometimes by too much self-condemnation on these tantalizing short-rising days, cursing their own stupidity because the pricked fish gets away: the fact being that no mortal man could have done otherwise. The great time on the Itchen is during June, when the May-fly is on. H—— studied the minds and bodies of the denizens of his stream until he knew their tastes to a nicety; and his floating May-fly is quite a *chef d'œuvre* of the fly-dresser's art. Prohibitive tariffs are imposed on casual visitors during the flight of the May-fly, a most righteous protection for both fish and annual subscribers. Sixty-nine brace were taken from the stream in one day not many seasons ago with the floating drake.

Last year, during an evening stroll while waiting for a train to town, I watched the anglers with their May-flies, and in the course of two miles saw captured five fish each over two, and a couple not many ounces short of three pounds. It is a peculiarity of the lower water that the trout are seldom small. A reverend gentleman, whom it is my pleasure to know as a devoted labourer amongst the poor and an honour to his profession, every year leaves the squalid homes of the London poor and the dingiest alleys of the most wretched parts of the metropolis, and allows himself a fortnight's fresh air and recreation on Itchen-side during this fortunate season. The river is a blessing to him;

Digitized by Google

and his modest expectations of sport are never falsified should the water be at all fishable. There are numbers of other anglers who in the same way never regret their introduction to the stream and the peaceful lowlands through which it winds.

But we are working at a disadvantage to-day; we try a few casts with Hammond's Favourite and Wickham's Fancy, two sweet little flies, upon the why and wherefore of which the author will deliver a two hours' lecture, so theoretically has he studied the shining body, delicate hackle, and slender wing of which they are composed. We see plenty of fish in the smooth reaches, but not the ghost of a rise. A couple of gentlemen whom we pass have met with no success, though they have tried all the favourite flies, and artificial minnows to boot. The mystic hour of two has passed, and, in the words of the old saying: "As the day lengthens, the cold strengthens." Down once more before the sou'-west blast comes the hail, causing the face to smart as if lashed with whipcord. The narrow stream is roughened into waves. We run before the wind under bare poles to the lee of the willow-bed, disturbing the moor-hens, who dive at our approach and appear again shaking their shapely heads fifty yards up stream.

Here, in cool grot, we find a third individual who has been forced into shelter. He is a man learned in trees and plants, and for ten minutes he bewails the backwardness of the season. He has cause, doubtless, for the common spring flowers which usually smile upward at the passer-by keep snug within their buds. The little celandine will scarcely open, though the primroses and violets have set it a good example. The trees are sulky as to blossom and bud, the ends of the branches appearing as if hermetically sealed with bits of wax. Still the coppices are almost imperceptible

Digitized by Google

tibly changing colour, and have now put on that port-wine hue which indicates advance towards leaf-time.

What was it William Cobbett, who thoroughly knew this part of the country, so prettily wrote?—"In spring they change their hue from day to day during two whole months, which is about the time from the first appearance of the delicate leaves of the birch to the full expansion of those of the ash; and even before the leaves come at all to intercept the view. What in the vegetable creation is so delightful to behold as the bed of a coppice bespangled with primroses and bluebells? The opening of the birch leaves is the signal for the pheasant to begin to crow, for the blackbird to whistle, and the thrush to sing; and just when the oak-buds begin to look reddish, and not a day before, the whole tribe of finches bursts forth into song from every bough, while the lark, imitating them all, carries the joyous sounds to the sky."

Let us be grateful, for lo! there comes a burst of sunshine, and we may now continue our wanderings along the Itchen's course. On the other side of the river below the town stands venerable St. Cross, the rooks wheeling and chattering after their kind in the wind-rocked trees. We have no ferry here, so we shall be in no danger to-day of presenting ourselves at the porter's lodge and claiming the bread and beer which, according to the charitable bequest of Henry de Blois, bishop of the diocese in 1136, every traveller may obtain for the mere asking even unto this day. The river here is broad, deep, and so clear that you may count the pebbles at the bottom and admire their polished whiteness; and do anything but admire the fearful American weed which has become a pest to English waters.

Hiding behind the alder, you watch the trout all still and listless save for the movement of the fin necessary to keep

Digitized by Google

them head to stream. From any point of view along the bank the buildings of the Hospital of St. Cross look picturesque. An angler appears on the other bank persevering in spite of difficulties, and he, without knowing it, throws straight across to the trout which we have been criticizing. The fly falls at first too far below him, for it is a long cast. The trout could scarcely have seen the flash of the footline on the water, yet at the instant of its fall he makes an uneasy movement with his tail. A second attempt brings the Hammond's Favourite lightly upon the precise ripple that would float it over the head of the trout, but he has disappeared like a stroke of lightning. In all England you shall not find a river requiring so much delicacy of manipulation as the Itchen. Wherefore let clumsy fly-fishers take heed.

In the upper waters grayling have been introduced with great success, and there are bright prospects of improvement in the breed of this handsome and sport-giving winter fish. There are nothing like the number of grayling there were in the Itchen twenty years ago, when thirty-three brace were taken in a day by one rod near Twyford, the village where Pope was partly educated. The grayling, however, lost their character, and were killed in season and out of season. When it was discovered that they far outnumbered the trout and worried their speckled cousins at the spawning beds; when it was darkly hinted that they devoured the ova of the trout, a war of extermination was resolved upon. The trout were rapidly decreasing, and trout could not be permitted to die that the grayling might live.

The march of science, however, interposed to save the grayling from annihilation in the Itchen. Artificial trout-hatching removed temptation out of the grayling's path, and hostilities ceased. It will be a boon to the grayling-

Digitized by Google

fisher to be able to run away from town on a nice snowy or frosty winter day and be amongst the Hampshire grayling within three hours. In a beautiful branch of the upper water there were three years ago placed twelve brace and a half of grayling. The next year—so rapidly do they grow—there were quantities of fish six inches long, and the multiplication has gone on satisfactorily ever since. A grayling of three pounds four ounces has been taken from the Itchen, but, of course, they do not often attain that development, although two-pounders are not rarities.

At the higher portion of the Winchester waters the rambler, after a couple of miles through grass and fallow, with a charming plain beyond, and the commencement of the Hampshire uplands on his left hand, might profitably spend his time in either sketching or angling. There are unusual facilities for both. From Winchester to Bishopstoke, as the traveller by the South-Western Railway may see, the river is smooth in its flow, rippling enough for music, but not enough for foam. Though it rises in the down country between Alresford and Alton, and flows through a vale which bears its name, it possesses none of the wild charms of a mountain stream. It runs through about twenty-five miles of delightfully rural scenery, ministering to seventeen villages brought in a very literal sense within the fold of the Church in days when abbots looted and kings thieved; it throws out and receives numerous tiny feeders, and is very often turned aside to wake up the drowsy water-wheel of the sequestered mill. It waters a goodly land; just such land as the shrewd-headed Lot—if he and the sheik Abraham had happened to hold their parting interview on one of these loamy hills instead of the Bethel grazing-grounds—would, on lifting up his eyes, have selected for his flocks and herds.

Digitized by Google

A river is often compared to a man's life in its inevitable advance from source to ocean. Does not the resemblance admit of many applications? Take the Itchen. From the moment when it rises out of the chalk at Ropley Dean to its reception in Alresford pond it sparkles in a confined sphere, bubbling and joyous in its childhood existence. Pursuing its way through the villages and meads, it widens and deepens, and casts out influences right and left, ornamenting stately manors and aiding the husbandman and miller in the more even tenor of its prime. Lastly, nearing the tidal estuary at South Stoneham, it puts aside its shallows and light-hearted ripplings, becomes "still but deep," and mingles with the sea without a murmur. So, the best and the worst of us must feel, should end a well-ordered life.

A rustic bridge near Winnal Church presents a variety of exquisite scenes for the artist; for the surroundings are well wooded, and the habitations of man and the natural charms of country life are most harmoniously mingled. The river here has several branches, some of them the perfection of trout-water, offering steady deeps for the artificial minnow and alternating shallows for the fly. This is the end of our ramble, and if we have before regretted the backwardness of the season and the wintry weather, we may doubly regret it now at a place where the summer verdure alone is wanting to complete the picture. The white willows without their feathery ornaments, the weeping willow without its drooping branches, the white-wooded alder without its distinctive though somewhat sombre leafage, are like ships without their canvas. To-day, instead of imparting their familiar lights and shades to the stream, they mournfully catch the passing wind and convert it into a song of hope deferred.

But there is in a tall tree opposite a bold missel thrush whom the hail-storms cannot silence; in Hampshire, and

Digitized by Google

probably elsewhere, they call this fellow the storm cock, because of his stormy-petrel qualities. We can hear him singing a defiant kind of war song, and probably his mate is near, sitting over her four or five eggs, purple-white, with pale brown spots. The water-wagtail, tamest of our stream-haunting birds, is out and about, and one fearless little busy-body, restlessly occupying a spit of gravel in the middle of the brook, seems to have an eye to our rods, which we have long ago abandoned, and which, there is no harm in repeating, we brought out more for the sake of airing than using them.

In the foregoing remarks I have spoken of the Itchen and its trout in terms, may be, that will make an angler's mouth water, just as that seven brace taken in this very meadow yesterday morning made mine perform that figurative operation. And the experienced angler does not require reminding that his pursuit is the most uncertain of sports, and that seven-brace days are rare in his calendar. But take it all in all, the Itchen is a good trout river. I have known it for some years as a rambler, though not much as an angler, and have seen the kind of sport it yields under average circumstances and with due exercise of skill. The skill, however, must be high, and to skill must be added knowledge of the water.

The large size of the trout has always astonished me. A fish of six pounds weight was taken a few years since with a fly, and that is indeed a noble specimen of the breed; but this, I presume, would be an event in a generation. Some of the regular anglers, Hampshire gentlemen, who know their ground, reckon their season's sport by hundreds, and not by dozens. The Itchen fish have a peculiarity which may be noticed occasionally in other streams; of two fish precisely alike in every respect to all appearance, one when

Digitized by Google

served up shall cut pink as a salmon and be delicious eating, while the flesh of the other is white and tasteless.

Here we may put our rods together and stroll in the evening half-lights back to Winton. Ours has been a desultory ramble, as rambles should be. We began with a cathedral, and end with the cooking of trout—very like the daily run of mundane affairs indeed. The stroll along Itchen-side has not damaged our appetites; the hail and wind have imparted to our faces a ruddy glow; and we have picked up some information which, when the proper moment arrives, will be turned to useful account by at least one individual.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IV.

CHARLES KINGSLEY IN THE SADDLE.

"WITH him I have cast in my lot, to live and die, and be buried by his side."

So, sitting in the saddle on one of the beautiful moorland eminences overlooking the North Hants parish where he had cure of souls, and referring to the humblest type of his parishioners, soliloquized Charles Kingsley. And so has it befallen. The good Christian gentleman dwelt among those dark-haired, ruddy Hampshire men for over thirty years; lived the life of the healthy-hearted in their midst, knowing all their ways and wants, sympathizing with them in their sorrows, rejoicing when they rejoiced; and alas! all too soon for them and for us, he has died in the prime of his life, and was buried, even as he wished, by the side of his own people.

The death of such a man as Charles Kingsley demanded, as it obtained, the notice accorded only to persons who have left a name on the muster-roll of fame, and the written reviews of his life dealt with his many-sided character in a manner to show how soundly and generously the English critic can

Digitized by Google

appreciate, apprise, and lament the worthy labourer in the fruitful vineyard of literature. His greatest creations, all the better perhaps for flaw-specks here and there, have received their due; the unspottedness of his character, his fidelity to the career which he chose for the exercise of his faculties, were acknowledged in all honour. This and more, however, we must here be content to take for granted.

There are two essays, published in *Fraser's Magazine* during 1858, which, so far as I have seen, were not referred to in any of the obituary notices which all classes of Englishmen, and English speakers, must have been indeed sorry to read, when the fatal announcement of Kingsley's death was telegraphed to the world. The one he terms "My Winter Garden," the other "Chalk Stream Studies." They are most delightful prose idylls; more than that, they portray an aspect of Kingsley's character which is a very pleasant one to contemplate, and which seems somewhat to have faded out of notice. In them, too, we find illustrated with peculiar exactness the many, and not unfrequently diverse, elements which combined to form a noble nature, the comprehension of which cannot be complete unless we study him through them.

The first of these essays is a superb and sustained self-communing which has such an air of actuality about it that we may without question accept the circumstances of its occurrence; herein also I find justification for the, to some, perhaps, startling title given to this chapter. Charles Kingsley in the saddle was to many connoisseurs of oratory a pleasanter sight than Charles Kingsley in the pulpit; the whole country-side would tell you he was a splendid horseman, but with all deference it might be said that the gift of an eloquent tongue was not his. Well can I remember the figure of a wiry, eager-eyed, manly-faced man,

Digitized by Google

pelting down one of the sandy roads in the Eversley country as if he formed part of his favourite cob, and bearing about him an evidence of the intensest enjoyment; well remember also the comment of a Hampshire farmer after the rector had cantered by: "Begad, if he hadn't been a parson he would have been the stiffest cross-countryman in these parts." This was saying a good deal, for the huntsmen in that district are no novices; but it was true.

Here, then, we have Kingsley photographed by himself in the saddle, blown upon by the chilly March breeze, but confident that he can always be warm if he chooses in that Winter Garden to which he conducts us. On the way he takes us into his confidence, and draws himself with that wonderful power of language which characterized the author of "Westward Ho!" In addressing the friend to whom he is explaining the secret of his happiness in "this monotonous country-life," he reveals himself as heart and soul a naturalist and a sportsman. The Westminster Canon could tell you as much about birds, beasts and fishes, about trees and flowers, and all that blooms under the sun, as any living being, and his eye would kindle at the thought of how many beauties the world has in store for those who turn their inquiring gaze towards them.

There is a perfect history in that strange title to his work on the West India Islands—"At Last." For years he had longed to be in the tropics, and then the time came when he could shake himself free from his duties and set sail towards the luxuriant islands of the western seas. Dean Stanley, who understood Kingsley as man seldom understands man, said truly, in his Westminster Abbey sermon in memory of his departed friend, that in every pore he was alive and awake to the beauties of Nature, and that his "eagle eye seemed to discern every shade and form of animal and

Digitized by Google

vegetable life; that listening ear, like that of the hero in the fairy tale, seemed to catch the growing of the grass and the opening of the shell."

Remembering his enthusiastic love of out-door pursuits, it is not surprising to be told by Kingsley, as he takes his morning's ride, that once his brains were "full of bison and grizzly bear, mustang, and bighorn, Blackfoot and Pawnee, and hopes of wild adventure in the Far West; which," he added, "I shall never see," little dreaming that in years to come a trip across the Rocky Mountains would sow in that iron constitution seeds of death.

His pulses, declares this genial country parson, throbbed as often as he saw the stag's head in his friend's hall; and then with mock dolorousness, and with just a *soupçon* of that muscular Christianity of which it was said he was the original patentee, and which, if it means anything, means making the best of both worlds, he confesses that when one can no longer enjoy the sights after which one longs it is best to take the nearest and look for wonders, "not in the Himalayas or Lake Ngami, but on the turf, on the lawn, and the brook in the park. For there it is, friend," he goes on—"the whole infinite miracle of nature in every tuft of grass, if we have only eyes to see it, and can disabuse our minds of that tyrannous phantom of size. Only recollect that great and small are but relative terms; that in truth nothing is great or small save in proportion to the quantity of creative thought which has been exercised in making it; that the fly who basks upon one of the trilithons of Stonehenge is in truth infinitely greater than all Stonehenge together, though he may measure the tenth of an inch, and the stone on which he sits five-and-twenty feet."

Kingsley's Winter Garden is at the present moment just what it was when he drew rein and slowly wandered on

Digitized by Google

beneath the lofty roof of the ever-fragrant pine wood, with the creaking of the saddle and the soft footfall of the mare upon the fir-needles jarring upon his ears. He calls this "ugly, straight-edged, monotonous fir plantation," into which he leaps over the furze bank, his Cathedral (how like him to interject "wherein if there be no saints there are likewise no priestcraft and no idols!").

It is glibly said sometimes that we in the old country have lost the art of the lighter and more popular form of essay writing, and bequeathed it to the Hawthorns, Emersons, Russell Lowells, and Dudley Warners of the New World. What, then, is this which Kingsley has in his Winter Garden?—

"Endless vistas of smooth red, green-veined shafts holding up the warm dark roof, lessening away into endless gloom, paved with rich brown fir-needle, a carpet at which Nature has been at work for forty years. Red shafts, green roof, and here and there a pane of blue sky—neither Owen Jones nor Willement can improve upon that ecclesiastical ornamentation—while for incense I have the fresh healthy turpentine fragrance, far sweeter to my nostrils than the stifling narcotic odour which fills a Roman Catholic Cathedral. There is not a breath of air within, but the breeze sighs over the roof above in a soft whisper. I shut my eyes and listen. Surely that is the murmur of the summer sea upon the summer sands in Devon, far away! I hear the innumerable wavelets spend themselves gently upon the shore and die away to rise again. It has two notes, two keys rather; that Eolian harp of fir-needles above my head, according as the wind is east or west, the needles wet or dry. This easterly key of to-day is shriller, more cheerful, warmer in sound, though the day itself be colder; but grander still, as well as softer, is the sad soughing key in

Digitized by Google

which the south-west wind roars on rain-laden over the forest, and calls me forth—being a minute philosopher—to catch trout in the nearest chalk stream."

So far the poet; now the sportsman. Still jogging along among the red fir stems, he ponders upon Life—"that one word Life,"—till, reflecting that all we can do is to "dazzle and weary our eyes like clumsy microscopists by looking too long and earnestly through the imperfect and by no means achromatic lens," he determines to think of something else. A hare races towards him through the ferns, and just as learnedly as he discoursed of everything else he discourses of the frightened animal, and is only stopped by the appearance of a great dog-fox, at which the rare old mare lays back her ears, and stands still as a statue, though he can feel her trembling between his knees—knees which one would dare wager instinctively closed upon the saddle in true fox-hunting grip, as in the old Dartmoor scenes where young Kingsley passed his early days.

From time to time a novelist of the Whyte-Melville type makes us tingle with his description of a ride after the hounds; but I know of nothing in fox-hunting literature so graphic and soul-stirring as Kingsley's account of the flight of the fox, the pursuit of the hounds, and the tearing by of the hunters. He wants to waken the echoes, to "break the grand silence by that scream which the vulgar 'view-halloo' call." His heart leaps into his mouth, the fifteen-year-old mare into the air. But no! he reins in himself as he reins in his horse, watches his red-coated friends ride away through the wood, and as he waves them on feels in all cheerfulness that his hunting days are over, yet is righteously proud that "county, grass and forest, down and vale," once knew his deeds, and that his gallant friends now threading their ways through the dreary yellow bog know that he can

Digitized by Google

ride if he so chooses; "and," adds he, "I am vain enough to be glad that you know it."

The poet, the sportsman, and next the parish priest. He says—and can we not see the tightened lines of his determined mouth, and bushy brows over kind iron-grey eyes the while?—

"It is past two now, and I have four old women to read to at three, and an old man to bury at four, and I think on the whole that you will respect me the more for going home and doing my duty. That I should like to see this fox fairly killed or even fairly lost I deny not. That I should like it as much as I can like any earthly and outward thing I deny not. But sugar to one's bread and butter is not good; and if my Winter Garden represent the bread and butter, then will fox-hunting stand to it in the relation of superfluous and unwholesome sugar; so farewell, and long may your noble sport prosper."

Shocking sentiments these, no doubt, to many estimable people. But the peasants and farmers around Eversley in their hearts will as long as they live think of Kingsley as their genial friend and wise counsellor, who in both letter and spirit ever fulfilled his sacred trust.

The poet, sportsman, parish priest, and, lastly, the philosophic naturalist. For the mare's head is at length turned homewards, and though she blunders at every step among the fir stems, fetlock deep in peat, and jumping the "uncanny gripes" at every third stride, he talks of "Aira cæspitosa, most stately and most variable of British grasses;" of gravel, mould, and heather; of decent public buildings, Scotch firs, and painters; hares, cattle, and turf-parers; Snowdon in the glacial era, the Œon, James the First and his admired hero Raleigh; Goethe's Helena, green comets' tails, Australian bushmen, and Celtic trackways; and so

Digitized by Google

goes across the village-green, where his applause encouraged many a sturdy cricketer on the summer evenings, up a hollow lane between damp shaughs and copses, to the old women in the cottages, and thence to the quiet rural churchyard to perform a rite which, ere this year* was a month old, his weeping friends under spreading fir branches of his own selection performed for himself.

Kingsley drew the line at fox-hunting, but he made amends with his fly-rod. The chalk stream trout had as much reason to fear him as did the black sheep of his parochial fold. Few anglers can draw so much delight from their recreation as did Kingsley. He was a trifle apt to be dogmatic in his theories upon flies and fish, as anglers often are, and as a man has a right to be who marries his enthusiasm to general scientific knowledge. He was a noted mountain fisherman, but better still he could succeed in the clear, steady, lowland streams which tax the skill of the best of us. Even in the saddle up among the fir-needles he must needs give a passing thought to his favourite pastime, of which he elsewhere said, "The angler is brought close face to face with the flower and bird and insect life of the rich river banks, the only part of the landscape where the hand of man has never interfered, and the only part in general which never feels the drought of summer—'the trees planted by the waterside whose leaf shall not wither.'"

The habit, very common to him, of putting his foot firmly down upon a thing in which he believed, comes out conspicuous in "Chalk Stream Studies"—a veritable encyclopædia to the trout fisher. The Blackwater, a westerly tributary of, and other smaller streams in, the Loddon

* 1875.

Digitized by Google

watershed, were within easy reach of Eversley Rectory, and the May-fly, "mortial strong last night, gentlemen," as the keeper remarked, would invariably tempt him forth—as it tempts every proper-spirited Waltonian—to the familiar waterways. He was able in these well-stocked and well-preserved waters in a most literal sense to cast his lines in pleasant places, where the ancient mill hummed for ever below giant poplar spires, bending and shivering in the steady breeze.

Failing fish, he pries into the mysteries of insect life, abuses the Transatlantic curse Anacharis, distinguishes in the tangled forest, "denser than those of the Amazon, and more densely peopled likewise," grass, milfoil, water-crow-foot, hornwort, startwort, horsetail, and a dozen other delicate plants, never forgetting, however, that there is work to do, seeing that while the green drake is on, all "hours, meals, decencies, and respectabilities must yield to his caprice." Through his pocket lens he shows you millions of living creatures upon the Vorticellæ; he takes you to the muddy bottom and lectures you upon the grubs, tadpoles, and water-crickets.

Just as when in the saddle he had glorified the foxhound as being next to a Greek statue in grace and strength, so by the river, with the spare casts wound round his hat, he lauds the transcendent merits of drakes green, brown, and white; of the dun, black alder, and yellow sally, in particular, and of the four great trout-fly families, phryganeæ, ephemeræ, sialidæ, and perlidæ, in general, laying down the very excellent law that the caperer, March brown, governor, black alder, with two or three palmers, are sufficient to show sport from March to October, and that "if they will not kill, the thing which will kill is yet to seek." In the whole range of angling literature there is nothing to surpass—nay, nor to

Digitized by Google

equal—in beauty of language, play of fancy, marshalling of facts, and flow of vigorous narrative, these forty-nine pages of "Chalk-Stream Studies."

In these essays, and on many another page, Kingsley's motto is, "Be sportsmanlike and sin not." In a still older contribution to *Fraser* (1849), in a charming paper upon North Devon, he puts in a plea for sportsmen on the ground that some of our most perfect topographical sketches have been written by them, and while admitting that the majority of sportsmen are the most unpoetical of men, he argues that for most of them it is sport which at once keeps alive and satisfies the æsthetic faculties, and helps to make them purer, simpler, and more genial. "Esau," he says, "is a dumb soul, especially here in England; but he has as deep a heart in him as Jacob, nevertheless, and as tender." Kingsley was an exception to his own ruling, for in this matter he was both Esau and Jacob.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER V.

OVER THE MENDIPS.

THE Parliament of Science is over, and the philosopher's playhour has arrived. At the bottom of the hill which lies between Bristol and Clifton the morning mists brood over the shipping; we have no mists on the higher ground, however, and no mists in either heads or hearts, for we are bound for the Mendip Hills, on an excursion which is to be a mixture of pleasure and profit. We are a small remnant of a scientific host who have departed, or are departing, full of pleasant recollections of venerable Bristol. Some went one way and some another. The far-famed St. Vincent Rocks at Clifton were irresistible lodestones to some; others wandered away over the splendid downs which make the fortune of Clifton, Redlands, and Durdham; others went further afield, and visited the yellow-watered bathing places in the Bristol Channel; others took the train to Bath, or carriage to noted villages and country houses, within the compass of a six-hours' drive.

Yet there is no necessity for hurrying away from Bristol. It would take a very long day indeed to get through all the objects of interest which are contained in the rare old city.

Digitized by Google

If ecclesiastically minded, there are the cathedral on Cottage Green, incomparable St. Mary Redcliffe, quantities of old notable churches, and the exquisite little chapel of St. Mark, where the Mayor of Bristol has a throne to himself, and the aldermen separate stalls as if they were bishops, deans, and canons, and where there are rare monuments and grand specimens of wood-carving. The antiquarians miscellaneous have a plethora of riches within their grasp. Here is a bookseller's shop, where Cottle, brother of Byron's loosely ridiculed "Amos," issued the earliest editions of the poems of his friends, Coleridge and Southey, and where Wordsworth and Coleridge actually wrote some of their "copy." There, still standing, is the house where Southey was born. Pepys came here, prying, as usual, into everything. Daniel De Foe (though we have the story only at second hand) here used, when in hiding from his London creditors, to emerge in glorious array from cover on Sundays, when, according to the beneficent laws in that case made and provided, no man dared collar him for being in debt. There is also the church in which young Chatterton pretended he had discovered the ancient MSS. Richard Savage, the now almost forgotten poet, died in the Bristol Newgate, and is buried in one of the churchyards of the city.

But, however old a city may be, the country around is older; the maker of the one was himself fashioned by the Maker of the other. Let us do the town, and the bits of history associated with it, full justice *en passant*, but forget them when we have left them behind for the open country.

A drive of some eight-and-twenty miles over the finest Somersetshire country, behind a team of four lively horses, with agreeable fellow-travellers in company, and a *bonne-bouche* in the shape of the Cheddar Pass at the end of the journey, is the very thing, you may take it, to clear out the

Digitized by Google

cobwebs which a week's severe sectionizing at the Parliament of Science may weave in the commonplace brain. It will be a long day, no doubt, but the longest day must have a termination, and the coachman of one of the five breaks that are to take our party—a hundred strong—from Clifton over the appointed route, lessens the difficulty by appearing just an hour later than he had any business to do.

A brave show our procession of four-in-hands makes as it clatters through the narrow streets of Bristol. The shop boys and girls, glad of the excuse for leaving their work, rush to the doors and windows; passers-by of all grades stop short on the pavement and gaze at us with wonder and envy; the cart and waggon drivers somehow do their best to hinder our progress and block our path; and the sky attempts to frighten us, by assuming a most threatening countenance. But at last we are through Temple meads, on the right side of Hill's bridge, and passing the neighbourhood to which, according to a Weal historian, Chatterton referred in

> "The cits walked out to Arno's dusty vale,
> To take a snack of politics and ale."

What a charming treat is a real country drive! Dog-cart, four-wheeled basket-chaise, pony-gig, or even donkey-cart, comes now and then as a welcome relief to the prosaic railway train; but what shall be said of the four-in-hand when you have secured a box seat at the driver's elbow? It furnishes you with mental eye-glasses that conceal defects and magnify delights; by its aid every wretched hamlet is "Sweet Auburn, smiling village of the plain!" every prospect pleases, and not even man is vile, except the chuckle-headed wainster who will not keep his own side of the road.

The coachman at first has enough to do to pilot his team

Digitized by Google

safely through the close thoroughfares, and get the leaders in sober trim. When a long hill invites him to slacken rein he tells you the life and adventures of all his "harses." Not very romantic are those equine histories, except that of the near leader—"a sort of a kind of a silver-tailed roan," as Jehu describes him, and who is blessed or cursed with such an insatiable appetite for chaff that the stable-keepers, in fine irony, impose upon him the task of working the chaff-cutting machine for the benefit of the general stable.

We must be careful in descending these steep, winding hills; five-and-twenty persons who, by their purchase of British Association tickets, are fairly entitled to rank amongst the wise of the earth, are too precious a cargo to be spilled in the ditch like water. So we apply drag-shoe as well as brake, and pick our way at a gingerly walk down the white hills which the Wells mail-coaches of the good old times used to clear at full tilt. The sportsmen are abroad, as we may hear by the frequent breech-loader in the stubble. Here is a country squire quizzing us from behind the hedge, gun over shoulder and setters by his side; there comes a gang of nutbrown labourers, sickle in hand, and gaping open-mouthed at the philosophers until the last consignment has rolled by in a cloud of dust. The business of every village is temporarily paralyzed during our passage.

Never mind; a balance is struck. The rustics admire us, and we are charmed with their thatched cottages, the purple plums, golden apples, green walnuts, blooming hollyhocks, sunflowers and fuchsias, drooping vines, and homely beehives of their gardens.

And what does not a country drive owe to the hedge-rows? We are a somewhat miscellanous party, but we all sing its praises; all, save the worthy geologist who finds

Digitized by Google

his sermons in stones only, and is not enamoured of anything that cannot be chipped with the hammer. A West-country hedge is always worth looking at, if you know how to look, and these of fat Somersetshire are in their glory. Wild hop and clematis let fall their graceful pendants; the blackberry appears black, red, and green on the same bough; the wild geraniums twinkle with sweet modesty below; startling crimson bunches set the mountain-ash on fire, putting out of countenance the hips and haws that, with the fruit of the elder-tree, are warning us of the approach of ripe autumn; among the sombre nettles gleam the orange-coloured berries of the cuckoo-pint, shunned by the children as poisonous, and fit only for snake's food; the harebells meekly nod their delicate cups; the scabious, wild mint, thistle, and many another wild flower, keep them company; higher up you may find clusters of the ripening hazel-nut, and wreaths of honey-scented woodbine. The fields are white with harvest; the orchards are heavy with bounteous fruit.

At Stanton Drew the church bells are ringing to welcome us, and across the lane flags are suspended, and garlands of dahlias. If any timid passenger has till now been fearful of the coachman's talent, the masterly way in which he tools us over the rough, tortuous roadway must reassure him. We alight in a meadow near a venerable barn, and follow the conductors of the excursion into the orchard. Our conductor-in-chief is a worthy prebendary, an eminent archæologist.

Stanton Drew is Stonehenge in miniature. There are in different fields three circles of stones. A rustic of pure Somersetshire type confidentially says to me—

"They be all right, maister. I've tried 'em lots o' times wi' a crowbar."

Digitized by Google

This man is a village Lyell probably, and though his curiosity has led him into trying sacrilegious experiments with his crowbar, he follows the party industriously, and listens to the prebendary's lecture, wagging his shock head with benign approval at the most technical words. "Monolith" seems to fetch him immensely. Whatever the rev. lecturer utters he turns to a younger Hodge and winks, as much as to say—

"Didn't I tell you so, you ignorant young chawbacon?"

Before the prebendary begins his lecture, however, we form into a circle in the orchard. The sacred stones, looming brown out of the grass, are in the rear; a herd of baby-calves survey us with innocent wonder; curs snuff, without respect of persons, at the heels of professors and learned ladies and gentlemen; the village children form an outer ring, each munching an apple, and chewing the cud of infantile reflection. Village patriarchs, who wear clean smockfrocks for the occasion, lean on their staves, and maintain a stolid demeanour. It is an interesting picture.

The rector of the parish, in the foreground, makes a little speech, bidding us welcome; and it occurs to some of us that his expressed hope that we shall make something out of the stones (all the books he had read, he must say, seeming to contradict each other) is a very neat side-thrust at the true believer in Druidical remains. Nevertheless, the prebendary explains everything with great pleasantness of manner and unobtrusive confidence in his subject, and shows us in the distance a bit of the real line of communication maintained by the Romans from Thames to Severn.

Some youthful Gallios of our party, I grieve to say, did not express overpowering anxiety to hear the prebendary's discourse about monolithic remains, but sat on the gates and stiles smoking their meerschaums, and, worst of all,

Digitized by Google

seeming to enjoy themselves hugely. What will become of that heretic who knocked out the ashes of his pipe on the veritable altar-stone of the Arch Druid, is a fate too painful for contemplation.

From Stanton Drew we shape our course to the Mendips, through more hamlets and lanes. "We are coming to *Chew* Magna," says a terrible Irish wit, who thus, by one masterstroke, refers to the village we pass and the luncheon we have in prospect. To avoid Harptree Hill—a severe stretch for the teams—we are invited to walk through the woods to Hazel Manor, whose owner is to entertain us at that repast to which the Irish wit so broadly referred.

It is a stiff pull for the pedestrians over the slopes of these glorious woods; but every breathing-space gives us superb landscapes. We are face to face with the range known as the Mendip Hills. Under the sunny sky they smile gladly upon us; as the clouds are driven over the sun by the south wind they put on ever-varying expressions of shade and sadness. The Mendips are exquisite as specimens of highly cultivated hill country that is not quite mountain, but something more than upland. They are pastoral to the very summit, richly wooded, parcelled out into cornfields and pastures by high hedges, and studded with homesteads and villages. The hills are boldly and regularly formed, and stretch away, as we see them from Hazel Manor, for miles, always telling the same tale of peace and plenty.

At Hazel Manor we are entertained with lavish hospitality; and the host, like a sensible gentleman, puts a veto on speechifying. In spite of this—for man, when he has become a member of a learned association, is essentially a speechmaking animal—we do get "a few remarks;" and one of the speakers openly confesses—"The chairman says

Digitized by Google

we are to have no speeches, but I have been ten minutes or more preparing one, and I mean to let it off."

After Hazel Manor we resume our drive, first to the Charterhouse Mines, where we have a number of Roman remains to inspect, an amphitheatre to visit, and two more brief lectures from the prebendary to hear, with much scaling of stone fences to vary the proceedings. If time did not press we might linger here to advantage, and look about us at the lead mines. The Romans appear to have discovered that the Mendips were rich in lead, lying near the surface, and it is found worth while even now to re-smelt the scoriæ. Amongst the curiously valuable remains taken from time to time out of the old workings are some Roman coins of the very earliest times, but not a Saxon example has ever been discovered. Evening, however, steals upon us apace, and, bringing our inspections to a close, we start once more, and for our final stage. We have to see the Cheddar Cliffs, over which Edward the Martyr, hunting on the moorland, narrowly escaped the fate of deer and dogs, which terminated a right royal chase by dashing headlong over a precipice.

If the Cheddar Pass were in the centre of some far-off land Englishmen would probably be much better acquainted with it than they are. Of our own party of six-and-twenty, two-thirds admit that they know little or nothing about Cheddar, except in connection with cheeses of that name. To be strictly accurate, it should be added that a very few confessed to a vague idea that there were some cliffs somewhere thereabouts, very fine in their way. We all, however, formed decidedly definite opinions of Cheddar before we had done with it—words could not express our admiration of the unique pass. But this is anticipating.

The descent from the elevated plain is fairly steep, but

Digitized by Google

gradual, and the road winds down a remarkably serpentine track. The rocks become higher on either side as we descend, changing from mere stones to ponderous masses of mountain limestone. The sloping shelves, up which at first a man might climb, become more and more perpendicular, until we are looking upwards at walls of picturesque crag, rising to a sheer height of over four hundred feet. Deep down in this romantic gorge we look upwards and discover the sky above, like a mere strip of distant grey. The Cheddar Pass should be approached as we approach it—from the Bristol side, and not from the village—because the scenery gets more imposing as you go down, and culminates in a truly magnificent spectacle during the last quarter of a mile. The faces of many of these rugged weather-seamed rocks are adorned with aspiring ivy and with large trees, shrubs, ferns, and grasses springing out of the fissures. The rocks assume all manner of fantastic shapes—now a hoary castle, now a temple of many spires, now a frowning fortress, now a city set upon a hill. Mysterious caverns appear high and low, and water silvers many a hollow. There is nothing in England, at any rate, to compare in the slightest degree with the grand rocks that stand, imposing sentinels, over this comparatively little known pass in the Mendip Hills.

At the stalactite cavern, which is the popular show-place of Cheddar, a halt is sounded, and we explore the wonderful interior, in which the son of the discoverer acts as cicerone. The cave, as the reader doubtless knows, is one of the finest in the kingdom, and abounds with that singular combination of outlandish figures that belong naturally to stalagmite and stalactite formations. It is kept in perfect preservation, and no man should claim to be a judge of British caves who has not added Cheddar to his experience. The guide-book is not far wrong when it says that the cavern, though of small size, is quite a fairy world.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VI.

OUT OF THE CHALK.

THE Wandle and the Darent both rise in the chalk downs on the border land of Surrey and Kent: the former to run its short course of ten miles to the Thames at Wandsworth, the latter to run much in the same fashion through Kent to the Thames at Dartford. Both are trout streams of fair quality; both are most difficult to fish; more difficult, perhaps, than the limpid Itchen, of whose tantalizing eccentricities in the matter of fish I have feelingly written in another chapter.

The Wandle has probably excited more hopes and caused more disappointments in the heart of the angler than any other stream that could be mentioned. Standing upon any of the bridges that overlook the private grounds at Carshalton and Mitcham, large fish may be discerned by the score. They make no effort to conceal themselves for more than a moment at a time; and if, through some bolder attempt than usual to scare them from the clean-bedded runlet which they have selected for the poising of their plump bodies and the graceful waving of their orange fins,

Digitized by Google

they dart for a moment to the shady bowers of a neighbouring waterweed, they return again even before the pretty ranunculus blossoms have ceased to wave to and fro, brushed rudely aside by the vigorous intruder. In deeps and in shallows, in the open streams, and between shelves of aquatic vegetation, close to the rushes and flowers of the margin, or in the centre of the broadest portions of the river, what matters it? The concentric rings are everywhere to be seen, first as specks, then as gradually enlarging circles to which the banks are the only limit.

Let us suppose—and I know of many worthy gentlemen who would be delighted if I could apply my supposition to them as a reality—that you behold this inspiriting sight as one who has a personal interest in it: as, let us say, the general, who rides out of camp to the eminence from which he watches the gathering of the foe until, hemmed round as he fondly believes them to be on every hand, he joyfully returns to quarters exclaiming that, his enemies being delivered into his hands, nothing more remains than to arise and smite them hip and thigh with great slaughter. So the angler, full of confidence as man can be, waits eagerly for the morrow, and hies to the Wandle.

Yes; there lie the trout with scarcely an altered position. The big fellow that you are prepared to bet is of two pounds weight still keeps the eddy which commands the finest position—for him—in the river, the position towards which the stream, without any interference or coaxing of his, will bring food, substantial and luxurious, into his mouth. There, too, lie the smaller fish on the alert for whatever Providence will send them. Putting the joints of your rod together, you fear that the creel will scarcely hold the trout you are certain to slay: you affix your winch, and, while you pass the line through the rings, generously in your mind

Digitized by Google

distribute your finest fish—a brace to this lady, two brace to that gentleman, and so on. As you unwind the cast from your hat and fasten it neatly to the line, you have the flush of victory on your noble brow. And you deliver your first cast.

Hem! But the link, of course, requires preliminary moistening, and the hand a little practice, before the cast will fall with that delicacy and precision essential to successful fly-fishing. Therefore you try again; once more; again; seven times, ay, and seventy times seven; but the adult trout in the eddy winks at you—if that stately wave of the tail is the way in which fish wink—and never turns aside at the tempter. Do your best by all means, but you by-and-by begin to suspect that a smaller creel would have answered just as well, and that the lovely Mrs. R. and the hospitable Mr. K. will have no need to write and thank you for those delicious trout.

Ask any Wandle fisherman whether this is not a fair picture of his earlier experiences by that delightful Surrey stream. It, alas! too often by half tells the story of visits to other rivers; but it has a peculiar application to the Wandle, until you know the mental and moral character of its trout.

Roughly speaking, the Wandle has its origin near Croydon. So much you may learn from any geography book that condescends to notice so juvenile a member of the world's river family; perhaps the last paragraph, as a sort of afterthought, following the custom of severely abbreviated treatises, will let you into the secret that "this river was anciently called the Vandle;" as I daresay it was.

As to its precise origin, I should not like to be bound to place my foot upon the exact spot; not so much because a boot-full of water is a thing to be as a rule avoided, as

Digitized by Google

because there are several springs which might claim the honour. From the heights from which an enemy might shell Croydon with terrible effect there issue many crystal springs, which forthwith, without shaking hands with each other, or in any way exchanging the time of day, proceed to hurry downwards until they approach a spot where a long while ago there stood the palace of their graces the Archbishops of Canterbury. In presence of so solemn a spot the rivulets become conscience-stricken, embrace each other, and, united, form for ever after the Wandle, with such additions as they gratefully receive from a branch rising at Waddon, and another that joins fortunes at Shepley House.

A very useful stream is the Wandle, and an object of beauty everywhere, at least above the point to which the turbid Thames sends its daily tides, with shoals of coarse-minded roach and dace that go up with it to hanker after companionship with the trout in the upper Belgravian regions, to which, however, they luckily do not succeed in penetrating. The Wandle grinds immense quantities of flour; it has an intimate and valuable connection with the snuff trade; paper, rough and smooth, is manufactured by Wandle-turned machinery. There are works of a very miscellaneous kind, in short, along the little river, and some of the mills are most picturesque additions to the beautiful park scenery through which it flows.

Not being in the humour to write four octavo volumes upon this subject, it will be incumbent upon me to deal briefly with the historical associations of the Wandle. Her Gracious Majesty Queen Elizabeth is supposed to have ascended its channel at various times in her State barge, and until very recently there was a venerable tree known from time immemorial as Queen Elizabeth's Oak; but a local board happened to pass that way, and the revered patriarch

Digitized by Google

was lopped, felled, and carted to a Croydon sawpit. The Queen used to love the neighbourhood of Mitcham. Sir Walter Raleigh dwelt there in some of his calmest days before the shadow of adversity crept over his bright life.

Dr. Donne lived at Mitcham too, and Dr. Donne was said by Dryden, who probably was not an indifferent authority upon such a point, to be "the greatest wit, though not the greatest poet, of our nation." It was better, anyhow, to live at Mitcham, where he could teach the trout a little piscatorial theology, than to take leave of his head in the Tower, as he very narrowly escaped doing for privately marrying the lieutenant's daughter. This, however, it should be said, was soon after he became a "'vert," and while he was private secretary to Lord Chancellor Ellesmere, a period of the witty man's life not to be confounded with the days when, becoming suddenly famous as a preacher, he had fourteen livings offered him in one fell batch.

Sir Humphrey Davy intimates that Dr. Paley, the gentleman dear to students of theology, did something with the Wandle trout, and states that the profound divine was so thorough an angler that when the Bishop of Durham asked him when one of his most important works would be ready for an expectant public, he replied, "My lord, I shall work steadily at it *when the fly-fishing season is over.*"

Admiral Viscount Nelson lived at Merton, and was a fly-fisher in the Wandle, even after he was reduced to one hand. The great hero fished in more troubled waters sometimes than "the blue transparent Vandalis," as Pope loftily puts it. And referring again to the author of "Salmonia," it will no doubt be remembered that the four gentlemen who are made to interpret Sir Humphrey's ideas upon angling opened their discourse, or to use the correct description, "Introductory Conversation—Symposiac," with

Digitized by Google

a fine-flavoured Wandle trout on the table around which they sat.

The Wandle country (valley we can scarcely term its course) is surpassingly charming. Beddington Park is open to the public with its rare trees, fine church and churchyard, and the red brick building which, once famed as Beddington Hall, is now used as a Female Orphan Asylum. Queen Elizabeth was a visitor to the Carews at Beddington, where the first oranges ever grown in the country—the fruit having been brought hither by Sir Walter Raleigh—were to be seen. Poor Lady Raleigh, in the later days of gloom and death, wrote to Sir N. Throckmorton, asking that "the worthi boddi of my nobell hosbar Sur Walter Raleigh" might be buried in Beddington Church. The church, whose tower is seen peeping above the lofty tree-tops, is a restored building, but some of the venerable trees around the churchyard must have weathered centuries of storm and sunshine.

A large, perhaps the major, portion of the Wandle country is enclosed with park palings and high walls. It is a country that teems with villas and "desirable residences;" with highly cultivated grounds which an ordinary pedestrian would find it as difficult to enter as Parliament (perhaps as things go he would find it much more difficult), while a strolling angler would risk instantaneous cremation if he dared to look through a hedge. It is, of course, very natural that when a gentleman has spent money and time in beautifying his country residence he should wish to keep it to himself; and equally natural that the owner of a well-stocked trout river should not insult his fish by allowing every pot-hunter to thin them out.

There is to my knowledge one bit of free water on the Wandle, and one only, namely, the ford at Hackbridge. The space at the angler's disposal is not vast, and there are

Digitized by Google

inconveniences natural to the position; small boys claim a share in the fisherman's privileges, and lessen his chances of sport by their clumsiness, and still oftener by their deliberate attempts to disturb the water; and all the waggon and cart drivers who journey that way make it a point of honour to drive through the stream rather than keep to the high-road. This they have a perfect right to do, and the legs of the horses, it is true, receive no injury from a temporary lave.

As a lesson of patience, I never saw a finer trial of temper than came under my notice while lolling over Hackbridge, observing the trout, especially the beauties rising and frolicking in the upper and forbidden part. A gentleman, who had been drawn all the way from London by the rumours he had heard of the trout to be caught in the Wandle, was most skilfully whipping the ford. The water rushes in the finest style from beneath the bridge, where it escapes in force from an obstruction on the private side, and there were three or four trout, as one would expect in the streams, on the look-out for a meal. An idle urchin, however, took it into his head to perch upon one of the parapets directly above and swish the stream with a heavily-leaded line, to which I discovered (having nothing better to do than interfere with other people's business) he had no hook attached. As in duty bound I promptly informed the angler that the young scoundrel was not even pretending to fish, and the latter was requested to desist. He refused, and was threatened with switching; in reply to which he insolently laid down the law to the angler, discussed general principles of "right," and defied the aggrieved fisherman on pain of the "perlice" to lift hand against him.

The gentleman, seeing the manner of creature the boy was, turned to the lower part of the ford, and by a series of artistic casts managed to throw the fly at least fifteen yards

Digitized by Google

down the stream. By this change of policy he got amongst the trout, and killed three, averaging perhaps half a pound, in the course of the two hours during which I was a silent observer. The boy, as I was leaving, returned with four others worse than himself and a hideous-looking stableman, and commenced aggressive action by shying pebbles and volleys of dry peas into the water. I should hope for the sake of the free-fishers who take advantage of these few yards of open ford that this annoyance does not often occur, for I have been told many enthusiasts walk a dozen miles in order to be at the spot by daylight. Driving over the bridge you may often see some very good fish rising within the compass of a long downward cast.

The Wandle trout require the tiniest of flies and the finest of tackle. With these, and with the utmost skill, you seldom obtain much sport during the daytime. It is an error to suppose, as I have repeatedly been informed, that the river is never discoloured. The water flows from the chalk strata, and receives but little addition from immediate rainfalls; but drains and gutters communicating with the roads cannot fail to bring down a certain amount of discolouring matter, and at times, soon after heavy showers, the water becomes foul. But near its sources to an extraordinary extent it speedily resumes its normal clearness.

A local resident, to whose efforts in fish culture I shall refer presently, in his delightful book entitled "My Garden," says—"The Wandle taken as a whole is the perfection of a river; its water is as bright as crystal, and is purity itself. It does not overflow with rain, nor is it deficient in dry weather. It does not freeze in winter, nor does it become very hot in summer. It has existed through all historic times; and as long as the chalk retains its porosity, and is protected by a bed of clay underneath, and a bed of blue clay on that

Digitized by Google

portion of its upper surface which is most depressed, and as long as rain falls upon the more elevated portion, so long will the water continue to ooze from the earth by day and by night, by summer and by winter, and to run its course as the River Wandle, and it may thus exclaim in the words of the poet:—

"Men may come, and men may go, but I go on for ever."

The inherent clearness of the river is doubtless one reason why the Wandle trout have a reputation among anglers for most unchristianlike obstinacy and immoral shrewdness. Another cause is the exceeding smallness of the flies which haunt the river. After dark you may venture upon moths and hackles of fair dimensions, but so long as daylight glints on the stream, midge-sized flies, and those only, must be used. To imitate these tiny insects is not so difficult as to employ the artificial imitation with effect after the fly-maker has constructed a perfect specimen. There is, I believe, a special kind of fly manufactured for the Wandle, and a neater article could not be conceived. The most commonly used varieties are a red spinner, a quill gnat with red hackle, a governor, a coachman, and a blue floating fly, which you may term either an upright or a dun; but whichever description is used it must be considerably smaller than a young housefly.

Having induced your trout to rise at one of these specks, you are confronted with the problem how to land a lusty fellow of over a pound in weight with tackle thinner than single hair and a hook which, under the most favourable circumstances, cannot be imbedded much more than the sixteenth of an inch in his mouth. The Wandle trout are fond of merrily leaping out of the water when they feel the barb, and if the first flight does not release them from their

Digitized by Google

enemy they try a second and third ascent into the air. Lucky indeed are you if by a timely lowering of the point of your rod, and a masterly coolness of mind, you do not in these trying moments part company with your captive.

But there are other dangers ahead. The line tightens, yet the well-tempered gut has not parted, and the hook, Liliputian though it be, has not been torn from its hold. That is encouraging: you think your friend is as good as netted when he goes off with a steady strain, and you allow the top of your supple rod to do all the work. The weed forest, however, is a refuge for the hunted, and towards it the fish, butt him as you may, intends to go. If you turn him and deal firmly in your resolve not to permit him to take cover, the fish is yours, but the chances are five hundred to one in his favour should he push so much as his gills into the tangled growth. Your line comes loosely back, and you are left lamenting.

And it is astonishing how few rises one obtains compared with the number of fish to be perceived. It is probable that there is a vast quantity of natural feed in the river. Minnows are rare habitants, and in many portions they are not found at all; but there is a great wealth of insect life. At odd times—and they are the angler's golden hours, the fleeting opportunities when he receives compensation for a hundred blank days—the fisherman has nothing to do but to arise and slay. In dull, warm weather, this may occur in the fore or afternoon, but generally it is found to be at and after dusk. Then a single fly carefully dropped above the fish will be certain to seal his fate if the caster have the skill to retain the prize which fate has given him.

The fun is very fast and furious while it lasts, and you have no time to pay attention to any other object. Your friend, wandering up and down in that restless manner with

Digitized by Google

which a non-angling companion at the waterside provokes you, flicking off the heads of the purple loose-strife and ox-eyed daisies, comes and bids you admire the glorious tints of the sky, newly forsaken by its tyrant king.

"By Jove, sir!" he says, "it's just the sort of thing Turner would have painted."

This is said at the moment when you have found glad occasion for rapidly removing your thumb from the rod—any fish may be struck by that simple process—and Turner and sky and restless friend are as nothing against this twelve-inch *salmo fario*. He is all the world, and the rest is a China orange.

The best angling portion of the Wandle is that which is preserved by an association, numbering a few gentlemen, who take the greatest care of their treasure, and conduct it upon the soundest of principles. They are to be envied in their possession, for, as any one standing on Mitcham bridge and looking up to the picturesque mill, and sluice running heavy with trout down by the garden side, may see for himself, it is full of fish. Each member is bound by certain rules, and it is enough to make a hapless outsider's mouth water to read that all fish of eleven inches and under must be returned to the water; that no member must take more than *three brace per day*, and that the limit of fishing after dusk must not extend over one hour. Three brace of fish between a pound and a quarter and two pounds should, as the association very properly deems, satisfy any man blest with an ordinary appetite for sport. Walking over one idle afternoon, I found one of the members—and a very accomplished fly-fisher he was—in despair because he had caught his three brace in an hour and a half, and now sighed, like the ancient monarch, for more worlds to conquer.

The fish were rising "permiscuous." It appeared as if

Digitized by Google

they would have gulped a buttercup, or a fusee, or anything that came floating down the stream. And then, obeying some unseen law that always puzzles the angler, in a moment everything was quiet. There was not a rise to be seen. Who or what issued that sudden command, "Stop rising"? By what unknown system of telegraphy could the trout in the mill sluice fifty or a hundred yards off be brought into the same frame of mind, on the instant, as these other trout close under the bridge? This is a phenomenon the trout-fisher often observes, but can never explain; nor can he explain why by-and-by, perhaps in an hour, perhaps in six, the fish in every part of the river simultaneously resume their rising.

The Wandle association artificially breeds thousands of fish by which the water is constantly replenished. Having had the secretary's permission to walk through the grounds in the company of the bailiff, I had the opportunity of inspecting the boxes in a byewater, where the young fry were dining heartily off liver boiled, hardened, and powdered fine upon a nutmeg grater. The keeper spoke of his trout in terms of almost paternal affection, and apparently longed to take each mite out of the shoal in order to pat its head and otherwise bestow upon it proofs of his undying attachment. The Wandle generally owes a good deal to this association, which carefully breeds and guards the fish for the benefit of the entire river.

The most memorable treat I can remember in connection with the Wandle was a visit paid to the scene of "My Garden." Though ostensibly concerning a small plot of ground in the hamlet of Wallington, in the parish of Beddington, in the county of Surrey—a plot which, according to the Ordnance map, consists of 7·925 acres of land and water—it is a charmingly written and carefully studied de-

Digitized by Google

scription of the botany, natural history, and much of the geology of the whole country. The admirable illustrations with which the book abounds indicated to me that the garden was a desirable Eden to see; it proved itself to be Wonderland outright. But I dare not trust my pen to linger over it—over its glorious roses, its miniature valleys and glens filled with ferns of the choicest kinds gathered from all parts of the world; over its thousands of fruits; over the grand effect produced by allying the natural colours and forms of flowers and vegetables; over the faint scent of the tea-rose, the odour of the sweetbriar, and the honeyed perfume of the jasmine; over the romantic vistas, and giant trees waving on the boundary; over the wild flowers blooming everywhere, even to the humble but beautiful plants accursed by the modern gardener as noxious weeds; over the shrubs, birds, and reptiles, whose habits have been watched for many a long year, to be now recorded for our benefit.

In "My Garden" there is a chapter entitled "My Fishery," and it is that which has tempted me to refer to this Wonderland by the Wandle, converted by the enthusiastic author out of a piece of unprofitable bog. The river enters his grounds from Beddington Park, and forms a lake of considerable area and depth; it also communicates with a number of brooklets which are made to minister to the general beauty of the design, and which tend to the maintenance of various water-plants which could not otherwise find a place in the garden. Into the lake or river, for it partakes of the characteristics of both, ornamentations of various kinds have been introduced—rustic bridges and various aquatic plants. The dreadful Anacharis has, as usual, without being invited, thrust its snake-like branches into the domain, and thriven, as it thrives everywhere, in the wildest plenitude.

Digitized by Google

There were when Mr. Smee first took possession of the garden two kinds of trout—one short, with white flesh, which was in season in May and June; the other longer, with large head but with red flesh, which comes in season in July and August. From time to time Mr. Smee has made experiments in pisciculture, adding to the native trout other members of the family, brought from different parts of the country. Dr. Günther, of the British Museum, points out in his official catalogue that there are seven distinct breeds of trout in this section of the Wandle, and adds, "It must be remembered that Mr. Smee has introduced into this river numerous trout artificially bred from ova received from numerous sources." A gallant attempt was made to introduce grayling, but the experiment failed. At first young ones were raised from ova, but to no purpose. Then twenty brace of mature fish were conveyed from the Derbyshire streams, and put safe and sound into the water. It was a costly and difficult undertaking, but though many of the fish lived on for years, and made a show of spawning at the gravel beds, no young fish were ever seen, and by this time not a grayling is by any chance observed.

The Wandle is too shallow and gentle probably for this interesting fish, and the success of the endeavour made to introduce grayling into the Clyde may be attributed to the suitability of the Scotch river for that particular kind of fish. In like manner Mr. Smee failed to breed the burbolt or eel pout, and he reared thousands of salmon trout and char in his fish-house and turned them into the water, thus claiming the honour of placing the first salmon into any tributary of the Thames. After all the labour, thought, and outlay expended upon these difficult processes it was found that the trout and eels—and Wandle eels are as deliciously flavoured as Wandle trout—remained in sole and undisputed pos-

Digitized by Google

session, if we may except, as unworthy of mention in the same breath, the pugnacious little half-armed stickleback which is found in great quantities in the river.

* * * * * *

The Darent, or, as it is often written, Darenth, though it rises in the same hilly formation, sees the light at some distance from the cradle of the Wandle. Its course, which is a trifle over fourteen miles in length, is north-east, through a broad vale smiling with rich pastures, and adorned by many a noble country seat. By Wandleside you are never wholly free from the associations of town; the enclosed grounds give a suburban character to the surroundings, and indeed a drive through Clapham to Mitcham and Carshalton suggests that in process of time those genteel places will be part and parcel of the metropolis. The Darent, on the other hand, brings you into the pure open country, and into the sunny districts where hops entwine and cherry-cheeked fruits ripen for distant markets. Spenser, who took more delight in the English rivers as a whole than any other poet except Drayton, says:—

> "The still Darent, in whose waters clean
> Ten thousand fishes play and deck his pleasant stream."

Ten thousand might almost be taken in a more literal sense than Spenser intended, for the Darent is nearly as good a trout stream as the Wandle. The fish are thought to be more numerous in the latter river, but some critics pretend to have discovered a finer flavour in the Kent-bred fish. Remembering how near London is to the Darent, it is scarcely necessary to add that the water is most strictly preserved by the landowners. There is, however, a fair stretch of fishing allowed to visitors at the hotel, Farningham, and a more delightful summer resort you shall not find so near

Digitized by Google

the Royal Exchange as this quiet old-fashioned little town, which the railway has never yet invaded. The great chestnut tree and the antique brick bridge, the old church and the rookery, are pictures upon which the eye never wearies of resting, and the country around, rising boldly into sweeping downs, is full of lovely prospects, very varying in character, but always grateful to the observer who appreciates Nature in her soberer and more contented moods.

In the mill stream, above the hotel water, there are stores of trout which no man is permitted to disturb. At the head of this stream there stands a great white mill that supplies the town with the music of rushing water, which issues with great velocity from the wheelhouse, gallops along by the side of the road, disappears under the roadway, and comes into view again considerably sobered down; thence it flows in tranquil ripples through the hotel garden, through private fields where it is heavily fringed with trees, and by-and-by it meanders prettily through half a mile of meadow land which also belongs to the hotel fishery.

Fortunately for the Lion water, the intervening section between the bottom of the lawn and the end of the private fields is carefully preserved, and so overhung with trees that many of the fish can defy the angler. The trout, following their natural instincts, work their way up stream, and so come within the fair range of the hotel angler. As for the little millstream beyond the bridge, though it is less than a hundred yards long, it literally swarms with large well-fed fish; they are one of the sights of the place, and are so used to the profane eye of the public that they bear it with philosophic equanimity. At the lower end a notice-board is affixed to the wall, requesting the passer-by not to feed the trout. You may look over the iron railing and see three or four heavy specimens directly beneath you, while close to

Digitized by Google

the sides, and in perhaps not more than three inches of water, there are hundreds of herring-sized fish lying head to stream.

One Good Friday I went to Farningham to see the "opening day" of the anglers, and among other sights I must include large trout taking bread cast upon the water by an ostler. The fish leaped boldly at the crusts, rejected them, and turned down again with a mighty lash of the tail. An old man emerged in alarm from a neat little cottage opposite and sternly bade the ostler to desist. He was the guardian of this show place for trout, and right faithfully did he insist upon obedience to the orders painted upon the notice-board. On the face of it this regulation seems absurd; but trout are worth so much per pound, loafers are to be found even at peaceful Farningham, and it is sad to know that during the last two years the vile art of fish-stupefying by poisonous compounds has been growingly practised.

The May-fly does not visit the Darent any more than the Wandle, and the most successful anglers at Farningham use the Wandle flies, swearing especially by the Tom Thumb-like governor and quill gnat. It is but reasonable to expect that the privilege to be obtained in the hotel water is not thrown away. On most days there are some rods at work early or late; and after the beginning of June, though June and July are probably the best months in the season, the most sensible expectations will be those which are restricted to a very modest limit. On those golden occasions which are so few and far between, and so impossible to foretell, three or four brace of fish may be taken, but the man who can bring away his one or two trout need not mourn over his ill-luck. There are several very remunerative "stickles" just below the antique brick bridge; but the angler, if he would do anything, must keep far out of sight, and be as still as a mouse.

Digitized by Google

There are several gentlemen who never failed to appear regularly at Farningham on the eve of many successive Good Fridays, and the veteran tragedian Mr. Phelps was one of these, recognized always as an eminent actor, but also as a masterly killer of trout. In the very early morning or late evening there is generally a heavy trout to be picked out immediately under the spreading chestnut tree, for the plump fish in the millstream, in spite of the keeper and the notice-board, drop down from under the bridge to feed on the shallows, and may be communicated with if no person has passed along the brink before the fisherman's arrival. The first labourer crossing the bridge to his field-work will frighten all the fish, and before his heavy boots have ceased their ponderous thud you will have noticed the clear water ploughed in four or five different places by prowling truants scuttling home to the cool retirement of the dark arches and the protection of the notice-board.

As, year in and year out, time out of mind, this Anglers' Carnival has been held on Good Friday, a word or two more may be permitted respecting it. The event is not advertised or placarded to the world, nor proclaimed from the housetops; no special trains are laid on to the scene of action; but it is a momentous event, for all that, to a select company of the Waltonian brotherhood, to say nothing of the fish, who, one may reasonably suppose, are very material parties to the affair. This year (1875) proved no exception to the time-honoured custom. On this particular day, early in the spring though it happened to be, the trouting season commenced in the semi-free reaches of the Darent. You have, let it be said at once, very little chance indeed of introducing your hook-maker to a trout unless you repair to Farningham over night. Just as it is the early bird which picketh up the worm, so it is the early angler

Digitized by Google

who taketh the bloom off the day's sport on such an occasion as this. A smart schoolboy, upon being reminded of the story anent bird and worm, suggested that the moral cut both ways, because, though the diligent songster might by early rising reap the advantage of his excellent habits, the result was rather hard on the worm; and at Farningham both men and fish were severely exercised during the first few hours of Good Friday, as I may forthwith proceed to show.

We are, let us suppose, safely housed at the hotel—a most indispensable preliminary, for it is only by lodging there that you can enjoy the angler's privileges. It is Thursday evening, then, and the trout, as they look after their evening meal, would almost seem to suspect that their hours are numbered. Else, why should they dart up stream at the approach of the gentlemen who are wandering leisurely along the pleasant banks? The sun is sinking easily away over the downs, and in the fading light the campaigners of to-morrow are peering into the crystal depths, with grim purpose marking the whereabouts of the enemy. The intense eagerness of look and determination of demeanour of these enthusiasts might amuse a miserable creature who is ignorant of the joys of angling; but their doings are watched almost with reverent awe, certainly with kind approbation, by the Kentish men and boys who follow their movements, resting their arms in prolonged idleness upon the bridge. They know all about it. This inspection is one of the essentials of the eve of the Carnival. There are anglers, so to speak, who have grown grey in making these annual pilgrimages to the Darent. The miller's men regularly look for them; the ostlers are personally aggrieved if the major, or the doctor, or the professor, or the parson does not at the proper time make his appearance, creel over shoulder, rod in hand, fly casts round hat.

Digitized by Google

And, alack for the trout, these worthy sportsmen know exactly where they lie, so that unless they shift their quarters during the brief space of peace remaining, a sorry Good Friday will it be for them. This is why, in good humour, and secretly meditating doughty deeds, the anglers sit down to their *table d'hôte* in quiet Farningham, where nothing but the monotonous music of the millstream breaks the evening stillness, each diner, nevertheless, religiously keeping his own secrets, and resolving, not exactly, perhaps, to steal a march upon his fellows, so much as not by any means to be caught napping at the critical moment.

But for this trifling explanation you might suppose that the persons stealthily emerging from the hotel at the break of day had been guilty of something, the discovery of which they are desirous to avoid. They are merely anxious, let us say, not to interfere with the slumbers of their brother anglers—of course from the purest motives of humanity. The first grey of dawn still lingers over the valley and upon the hillsides when the first angler appears cautiously on the lawn. He glances around and notes with satisfaction that he is not forestalled, and that the wind blows down stream, and comes therefore from that quarter so dear to sportsmen. The lithe rod is put together in a twinkling, the cast already prepared is affixed to the line, and the sharp whirr of the revolving winch wakes up the birds which densely populate the neighbourhood. Soon other devotees of the gentle art arrive, and finding that they have not been able to lead off the operations of the day, as they had last night so resolutely determined, good-humouredly swallow their disappointment and fall-to with their weapons. But the fortunate gentleman down the lawn has not been twenty minutes at work before he has brought three trout to bank, and, like a sensible man and a knowing angler, hastens on to the lower meadow, to follow up his advantage.

Digitized by Google

By six o'clock something like a dozen rodsters are whipping the rippling Darent, working across and down stream as they must perforce do with the wind behind them, and very hopeful of success. Thus the Anglers' Carnival commences on a morning bitterly cold, with water clear as glass, and at a period of the season, there is no denying, much too early for trout-fishing, for Good Friday does not often tread so close upon the heels of Lady-day, and the Darent trout are, unlike their kindred in Wales, Devonshire, and elsewhere, not in ripe condition until all the April showers have fallen. Indeed, it soon becomes apparent that the trout are not rising heartily. In a stream so well stocked as this, to be sure, in the first hours of the first day, there will be more or less fish whose fate is sealed, but these picked off, the rank and file that remain prove very wary and hard to touch. By breakfast time, therefore, it is not surprising to find that the best sport of the day has been enjoyed, while the laggards who stroll across the lawn so late as eight o'clock find their chances reduced to a minimum.

The hotel water is good but not extensive; hence the trout have become excited, absurdly frightened at the dropping of the fly upon the water, and unreasonably averse to respond to the fisherman's desires. All the anglers are more or less skilled in the science; that is a consolation they all lay to heart, and a pretty sight it is to the spectator who can appreciate mastership in the fascinating pursuit, to see the delicate foot-lines, and carefully selected flies, cast straight and airily upon the water. Yet the most successful angler of the day, according to his own showing, defies the rules which most fly-fishers recognise. Though the water is so clear and shallow that you can count the pebbles at the bottom, he uses coarse white gut. Though small march-browns, and blue and whirling duns are insisted upon by

Digitized by Google

learned natives as most appropriate for the Darent, he employs a big homely-looking fly, that resembles nothing in Nature, and is not much as a work of Art; it is indeed as large as a humble bee, and a little like it in shape, only the body is black and the wings large and light coloured. Our friend, however, must know what he is doing, and before sunset dispatches to town fourteen heavy, handsome trout that are a credit to the water that bred and the man that killed them. It so happens that he nearly monopolises the sport of the day; the other anglers give him all honour, but they are of course unwilling to admit that his success is the reward of absolute superiority, and explain away the undoubted fact—swathed in green grass and half filling a large basket—in a variety of ways. Truth compels me to add that it was whispered about that the hero had feloniously killed his fish with a worm, for which the coarse tackle and large hook were well adapted. For the sake of fair play I hope this rumour was ill-founded, as probably it was, the angler being in position and education a gentleman, and one of the most regular visitors to the place.

To the Carnival during the day come numerous persons, simply to see the fun—strangers from London who have driven down, and after luncheon will drive back again; villagers of all grades who have throughout their lives been accustomed to go dutifully to church in the morning and lazily watch and gossip about the trout-teasers afterwards; and visitors, riding, driving, and walking, who are acquainted with the manifold attractions of the country. A delightful sequestered nook, indeed, is this ancient Kentish village: the three-arched bridge, hundreds of years old; the Norman towered parish church, the cottage eaves, the gabled houses and mills, and the trees far and near, are all venerable in appearance; and in many another way Farningham, sur-

Digitized by Google

rounded by the chalk hills which enclose the valley, reveals itself an out-of-the-world haunt where one may dream undisturbed, while the river flows on, here broken, there placid, ever murmuring but never turbulent, and the sights and sounds of pastoral life change only as the seasons advance. Farningham always strikes you as content to rest upon its reputation as one of the choicest specimens of an English village, dear alike to lovers of the picturesque and seekers after repose and health-giving breezes. The Darent beautifies all the district through which it runs, and none more than that portion of the valley where the busy mills are situated. So, with a bright sun to temper the cold winds, and Nature beginning to put on the livery of spring, it is seen at its best on this Anglers' Carnival, and the sportsmen themselves on such a day are not in utter despair should their lures fail to tempt.

The Darent, before it reaches Farningham, has passed through the finest portions of its watershed. Beginning its career at Westerham, hard by the North Downs, it touches the villages of Brasted, Sundridge, and Riverhead. Near romantic Sevenoaks it flows in a more northerly direction to Lullingstone Park, and by old Eynsford Castle. Mills are to be found at short intervals, there being to my own knowledge fourteen paper and flour mills worked by the Darent. At Dartford, with a parting bit of very fine scenery, the river widens out into Dartford Creek, and is a navigable branch of the Thames during the remainder of its course. About midway between Dartford and the mouth the River Cray from the south-west falls into the creek.

In the neighbourhood of Farningham the hop-fields, nut, cherry, and plum orchards are highly cultivated, and well worth a visit where feasible. The ornithologist also should be in his glory here. A resident landholder, who has shot

Digitized by Google

over the district man and boy for forty years, has in his possession a valuable case of birds, killed and preserved by himself, as an illustration of the various feathered visitors to be found in the neighbourhood. Besides the more familiar kinds, I noticed in his collection the landrail; the buzzard, which, not uncommon fifty years ago, is never seen now; the handsomely-marked butcher-bird, a yearly visitor, which never fails to make its appearance in the wake of the nightingale; the Dartford warbler; a brace of kingfishers, two of which not long since were captured opposite the hotel, so furiously fighting that they allowed themselves to be taken into custody; skylark, titlark, and woodlark; the restless bull-finch, and the curious snake-bird; the delicate little white-throat; the tiny golden wren; and many other examples of our British birds.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VII.

WALTON'S RIVER.

ISAAK WALTON, we may venture an easy guess, was a good fellow at business. Out of his man-millinery and linendrapery establishments he contrived to secure a competency that enabled him—lucky individual!—to retire from trade at the age of fifty and exchange the yard measure for the fishing-rod. His business habits, it may have been noticed by readers of his book, he carried with him into his recreations. All his fishing is done methodically. When he sets out upon an expedition, meaning to go towards Ware, he is not tempted—as some of us, and generally to our cost, weak-mindedly persuade ourselves to do—to dally by the way and waste time in purposeless fishing. Up Tottenham Hill he trudges, delivering that wonderful lecture upon all manner of subjects to his chance companions, nor sounds a halt until Venator, the otterhunter, in pursuance of a fell resolution made at starting to quaff his morning liquor at Hoddesdon, suggests a call at the Thatched House in that quaint Hertfordshire town.

The conversation of that memorable trio was, you may

Digitized by Google

remember, according to the lights of the period, very learned, very moral, and breathing of gentleness and peace. Beginning with the subject of otters, the discourse turned upon Montaigne on cats; the habits of birds, upon which Auceps, the hawker, held forth energetically and confidently, but, as modern ornithologists teach us, erroneously; upon the earth as a feeding ground for beasts, as portrayed by Venator in his defence in Hunting *versus* Angling; upon water, "the eldest daughter of creation, the element upon which the Spirit of God did first move, the element which God commanded to bring forth living creatures abundantly," —for so said Piscator in his eloquent harangue upon the use of fish from the days of Moses downwards; upon Florence and Rome, the tomb of Virgil, and the humble house in which St. Paul was content to dwell. Who can forget Walton's triumphant asseveration, "I might tell you that Almighty God is said to have spoken to a fish, but never to a beast: that he hath made a whale a ship to carry, and set His prophet Jonah safe on the appointed shore?" Then came the bold suggestion that if Belus, "the first inventor of godly and virtuous recreations," was not the discoverer of angling, it was Seth, the son of Adam, who taughts the delights of the rod and line to his children, and the equally daring hint that the patriarch Job and the prophet Amos were, if I may without irreverence put it so, the crack anglers of their day; the poetical contemplations of Du Bartas, upon whose authority we have it that a certain fish called the sargus was wont, after playing Don Giovanni amongst his own kind, to flirt wickedly with the "she-goats on the grassy shore"; and many passing remarks about Thracian women and turtle-doves, the fish-pools of Heshbon and the piscatorial adventures of Mark Antony and Cleopatra.

Digitized by Google

Having this inexhaustible conversation before me, I should say, were I allowed the privilege of a private opinion, that these pleasant wayfarers were quite ready for their cup of drink when they at last reached the village hostel. We smile almost as a matter of course at these Waltonian dialogues, for we are appallingly smart in these days. Yet it is an appetising picture—these three men going to their respective amusements along the high road "on a bright May morning long ago," and with zest enjoying each other's company, the scenery, the anticipations of sport, and exchanging notes upon men and things with a beautiful old-fashioned simplicity and courtesy. Let us accept it, at any rate, as a picture of the Lea angler and his method in that middle period of the seventeenth century.

The Lea angler of the present day takes a return ticket at the Bishopsgate Railway Station, and is rarely to be seen marching along the high road. Walton's river represents the East End angler's paradise, and special privileges are granted to him by the Great Eastern Railway Company. The Sabbatarian who is at all sensitive respecting the observance of the Lord's Day had better not take his Sunday walk upon the banks of the Lea when the East End contingents are out on the war-path.

The style in which these humble brethren of the angle charge the ticket-office at Bishopsgate Station is a sight never to be forgotten. Tired with a week's toil, and many of them with honest workshop stains still tinting their noble brows, 'prentice lads and pale adult journeymen by the hundred rush in, laden with rods and baskets, so eager for the fray that they forego their night's rest in order to catch the midnight train that takes them to Lea-side. When the grey mists of early morning are hanging over the meadows you might possibly observe a few couples plodding towards

Digitized by Google

Tottenham from some Bethnal Green bye-lane, where overnight they had carefully boiled the rice or wheat for bait which now forms part of the pack which they bear. Literally they are too poor to spare sixpence upon railway travelling; but it cannot in any wise be said of them that

> "Chill penury repressed their angling rage
> And froze the roaching current of their soul."

The rank and file of the Lea anglers are, it must be meekly confessed, a trifle rough in language and in demeanour. They employ figurative speech. Even in Walton's time there were swearers on the Lea; the breed has been perpetuated, wherefore let me recall yet another reminiscence of that May-day ramble. "At Trout Hall," says Walton, "not far from this place, where I purpose to lodge to-night, there is usually an angler that proves good company; and let me tell you good company and good discourse are the very sinews of virtue: but for such discourse as we heard last night, it infects others. The very boys will learn to talk and swear, as they heard mine host and another of the company that shall be nameless."

At Tottenham I have seen a score of patient fishermen occupying as many yards of the river bank,—the old barge river,—and if they had taken roach every time they swore an oath there would not have been many fish left to catch. Milkmaid Maudlin's mother paid Piscator the compliment of admiring him and the angling fraternity at large. She promised him a syllabub of new verjuice "in a new-made haycock for it," and one of the daughter's best ballads, should he come that way a couple of months later.

"For," said the sensible creature, "she and I both love all anglers, *they be such honest, civil, quiet* men."

Maudlin and her mother spoke no doubt as they found.

Digitized by Google

The Lea milkmaid of to-day does the same: the conclusions differ.

"I'll 'ev yer milk ken, Carrots," I heard a Lea angler remark, in this year of grace, to a golden-haired maiden who carried the milk-pail.

"There's no abidin' these imperent reskels; I wish they was drownded," replied the nymph—without a hint of syllahub of new verjuice should the "imperent reskels" happen to pass that way on a future occasion.

But these criticisms apply only to the rough-and-ready division of the class—the men who overrun the bits of open water nearest London. They are not the class of person who will trouble the innkeepers; the rush basket slung over the shoulder contains, with the ground-bait maggots and worms, the frugal fare that will suffice until the cupboard in Bethnal Green or Shoreditch is once more at hand. They do not believe in begging or buying permission to fish. Not only are they acquainted with every inch of free water: they have intimate knowledge of every piece of half-watched or wholly neglected subscription fishery, and are not backward in turning it to account.

Fortunately for the bulk of the Lea fishermen, who are as keen sportsmen as any, the river is being most sensibly conserved by a board which protects it from the Ishmaelites who preyed upon it, so that after all this lapse of time and constant fishing the Lea certainly retains its old Waltonian character for excellence. In the first volume of that most useful guide for anglers, "The Rail and the Rod," Mr. Greville Fennel, by his thorough treatment of the Lea country, simply leaves nothing to be said of the angling capacities of this river. Of the fish, fishermen, their habits and peculiarities, he speaks with unquestionable authority, beginning at Old Ford and pausing at every station until

Digitized by Google

the Lea and all its tributaries have been described with a minuteness that omits scarcely a roach swim or reach of any importance. As a set off against my picture of "the residuum," I will put Mr. Greville Fennell into the witness box. I call him as to character, and this is his evidence:

"Nine-tenths of the Lea anglers are men of sedentary habits, and they bring these habits out with them. They walk from the rail to the river, and when there to seat themselves before some six or seven feet of water is the extent of their ambition, and whether they take from fifteen pounds to forty pounds weight of white fish home or not, they appear ever contented and thankful for the opportunity of getting out into the fields and inhaling the sweet air of heaven. As a body they are remarkable for their sober industry when at their various trade avocations, and when following their darling pursuits by the stream for their unobtrusive manners and almost taciturn disposition."

Should any reader wish for practical information respecting Lea angling he will obtain it in No. 1 of "The Rail and the Rod," and should any prefer a more general description of the country through which the river flows its gentle course, I can recommend him nothing better than the pages devoted to the subject in one of that river-loving author James Thorne's "Rambles." The fact of the Lea being so distinctly Walton's river will probably account for the extensive literature which it may call its own; and the stream, though possessing no such romantic and diversified scenery as the Thames, passes through so many centres of historical interest that the literary taskmaster, taking up the subject, has been provided with an abundance of very excellent straw for his brick-making.

The hills are very gentle in their undulations, the uplands are a charming specimen of pastoral England, the river is

Digitized by Google

fringed everywhere with rushes, flags, and with willows that whiten, and aspens that quiver, while, to pursue Tennyson's imagery,

> "On either side the river lie
> Long fields of barley and of rye
> That clothe the wold and meet the sky."

A quiet day by Walton's river seemed to me a heaven-sent inspiration when in a restless mood I put back the books that would not seize my attention and took down the fly-rod that has so often tempted and bidden me come forth. Yes, a quiet day on the Lea was the recipe for cobwebs on the brain. The day was favourable—cloudy, warm, breezy—in a word, the very day for a saunter by a stream which might be easily whipped. Rye House suggested itself; Rye House, therefore, should it be.

At Bishopsgate Street Station, after I had taken my seat in the train, I remembered that it was Saint Monday. The carriages were crammed with excursionists, in which women and babies at the breast largely preponderated. Accordions squeaked and fiddles brayed in, as it seemed, every compartment. There were negro melodists by the dozen. A fat young woman, a thin old woman, and two children who were regaling themselves on saveloy primitively conveyed to the mouth, were thrust at the last moment into our carriage, which had already received its regulation number of inmates. The children pelted each other with morsels of their dainty food, hit a High Church clergyman in the eye with a piece of yellow fat, were cuffed by their protectors, howled like jackals on the prowl, and finally went from passenger to passenger examining their garments, buttons, and watch-chains, and asking the company generally for toffy. The old woman insisted upon having the window up; the young woman drank gin from a flat bottle. Then the young

Digitized by Google

woman insisted upon having the window down, and her elder took a turn at the flask. The train rattled along famously, but the uproar from engine to brake-van was heard above all. Children squalled, discords from the musical instruments prevailed, break-downs on the carriage floors were heard. As I observed above, a quiet day by Walton's river seemed to be a heaven-sent inspiration.

This lively freight was of course destined for Rye House the grounds of which were already thickly peopled with excursionists who had preceded us. Whether the men adorned with sashes were members of some society I was not informed; whether the women who accompanied them were wives or daughters I did not inquire; whether they had travelled by rail or come down in the collection of vans drawn up in position in the meadow is not of much importance, but a larger number of fairly dressed men, apparently mechanics, and women of the same class, overseen in drink before two o'clock in the day, I had never before seen and would fain hope shall never see again. These people threw a sinister shade over an otherwise bright picture. There were hundreds of children present enjoying the many attractions of the place with the light-heartedness common to scholars on their annual outing; there were families of respectable working folks quietly examining the curiosities to be seen, and strolling through the prettily laid out gardens; but these hundred or two of club men of some kind, dancing and whooping, obtruded themselves in the arbours, fields, and recreation-ground, giving the place, which is extremely interesting, and the rest of the company, which was numerous and well-behaved, a character which neither deserved.

Another time I should have explored the Retainers' Hall, examined the Great Bed of Ware, descended to the dungeon

Digitized by Google

depths, and read the true history of the Rye House Plot. But I had timed my visit inopportunely if a quiet day on the Lea was my object. Rye House is evidently a most popular resort, and on a day other than Saint Monday, when the place is in a chronic state of miscellaneous merriment, any one who has not previously visited it may spend a profitable and agreeable hour or two in the old hall and Conspirators' Room, where there is a collection of ancient paintings, tapestry, and antique carvings. The tavern and the old hall have a really rare picturesqueness, and the grounds are most enjoyable—only not on the festival of Saint Monday, unless you can enter heart and soul into Saint Monday humours. And if I have not made sufficient allowances on this head, I bow in penitence. Heaven knows some of the poor creatures, whose life is one long mill-horse round, ought not to have harsh judgment meted out to them.

An hour or two's boating or angling in the Lea, a quiet dinner in the waterside tavern, a cigar in the rose-covered summer-house in the cool of the evening, have here afforded peaceful content to many a citizen temporarily released from the cares of business. During the summer months the visitors to this place are numbered by thousands, and on extraordinary occasions by tens of thousands. It is noted for its bean-feasts. The *City Press* doubtless honestly represented the estimate commonly held of Rye House, by City readers, in the observation "Far away on the other river which runs its silver thread through the green pastures and glowing acres of Hertfordshire is the good old Rye House, where we have art, science, history, romance, boating, horticulture, fishing, a lovely English landscape, and jolly English cheer, all in one short holiday."

The Rye House water is beloved by anglers, for the pro-

Digitized by Google

prietor, like the proprietor of the Broxbourne fishery lower down, takes a personal interest in their wants. Roach, chub, jack, perch, and occasional trout are to be found in the Lea, and all the fisheries are well stocked. I strolled away down Lea-side by the tow-path, and soon left the music and singing in the rear. It was possible, therefore, after all to get my quiet day, and I appreciated it perhaps all the more after the experiences of the railway carriage and the sash-wearing boozers. There were four or five solitary anglers quietly ensconced on the sedgy margin, admirable examples of the Lea style of fishing. Upon this river no punt is necessary. The holes are well known, and each swim has its name, often that of an angler who has at some time or other performed heroic feats worthy of commemoration in a substantial form.

The jack season had not begun, and the solitary anglers were looking after roach and chub. They used single hair foot lines, no running tackle, and fine quill floats, carefully plumbing the depth, and using ground-bait with much more discretion than is usual amongst Thames anglers. One man wielded a rod two-and-twenty feet in length, and a tight line only long enough to give a clear eighteen inches between point and float. It must have been extremely tiring to handle the lengthy bamboo and take the joints apart at the capture of every fish. The men angled with consummate patience and skill. He of the twenty-two feet implement caught a chub of more than a pound weight soon after I had sat down to watch him. To my perception the porcupine float did not betray a bite or a nibble, but the angler saw a movement, to which his ready wrist responded by a quick outward action, the effect of which doubtless astonished the hooked fish. The chub, chub-like, at first made a dangerous run for it, but the point of the rod dexterously followed his

Digitized by Google

movements, and he soon came up on his side. Two joints of the bamboo rod were unshipped, and the cheven was basketed with a couple of dozen of roach that had previously been taken.

Another man was using the blow-line with some success. This is a favourite Lea fashion in chub-fishing, and on windy days not at all a bad notion. It is a well-known mode of dealing with the May-fly on the West Meath lakes, but it is not much practised in England, except upon this river. The Lea blow-line fisher uses the "daddy long legs," grasshopper, blue-bottle, or housefly, and in very hot weather takes large roach as well as chub by his long floss-silk line. My Rye House friend had a bunch of "daddy long legs," of the size total of a walnut, and he had the mortification of hooking and losing a heavy chub that rushed half way across the river before it seized the mystic object flitting so naturally on the rippled surface. The fish was struck too sharply, and the floss silk gave way. With the blow-line unusual delicacy of striking is required, because of the length and stiffness of the rod and the slackness and a certain waywardness in the behaviour of the line.

A roach fisher is nothing if not Job-like in the matter of patience. And a very pretty amusement roach fishing is—when the fish bite: otherwise I must say the occupation is a dull one. It is monotonous to hold the long rod in one position, to make it follow the float to the end of the swim, to lift the bait out of the water and drop it in the same spot as before, and to repeat a thousand times over that uneventful journey of the quill to the end of its tether. Perhaps once in fifty times the float disappears. It is a doubtful motion. The slender tell-tale, to be sure, has gone under the water, but it is in so faint-hearted a manner that you are quite disposed to believe it is caused by the bait

Digitized by Google

touching some obtrusive hillock on the bottom of the river. You must, however, strike, and a tiny fragment of weed, like a bit of hair, is all that the bait has added to itself. When the fish are feeding it is a merry sport indeed. The sharp stab of the float when the roach is in earnest leaves you no room to doubt; the quick, firm strike is made with a heart full of confidence and a wrist that knows the correct trick. Thus, with care, you may go on catching silver-sided fish throughout the livelong day, never once moving from the little armchair you have made for yourself out of the bank of rushes and sedge.

The Lea roach fishers pride themselves upon being the most skilful in the kingdom "bar none"; it is true they consider the Thames anglers decent, after a fashion, but object to a certain coarseness in their style, consequent upon the enforced use of the punt. They are willing to do all justice to the Nottinghamites, yet give them an inferior place. In sooth, if the Lea men are not first-rate roach masters they ought to be. Their river swarms with that description of fish, and the stream, by comparison with Thames, Trent, or even Ouse, is small. Moreover, it abounds with oft-recurring holes, with a firm bed, a steep bank, and a placid flow of water.

A plethoric Lea roach fisherman, sitting on his square basket, which answered the treble purpose of seat, game-bag, and locker after the sport was over, once assured me that all you require for roach is a stock of patience. His idea of a "stock" of that article was sublime. He had been sitting three hours on a muggy, damp November day without a bite, smiling sweetly as swim after swim was effected without a break in the ill-luck. He relieved the monotony to some extent by an occasional affixture of ground bait to the shot of his foot line. Even I, so great

Digitized by Google

was the monotony, in half an hour could regard this artful dodge as a piece of positive excitement. The float, as every roach angler would expect, was shotted down to within a quarter of an inch of the water, and the additional lump of bran and bread naturally sank it completely under like an overloaded ship. Then came the agitating moments. How long would the float remain under water? Would the artful dodge entice a fish? At last slowly emerging from the depths issued the glittering porcupine, nodding, as it were, confidentially to its owner, before it resumed its silent glide over the tranquil swim. But there was no captive on the hook, and the angler, I verily believe, would have felt a little aggrieved if sport came so soon. It was one o'clock in the day, and the wildest expectations in which he could indulge were that the fish would "come on" in the cool of the evening.

It is a pleasant walk from Rye House to Broxbourne, where the cream, nay, the very Devonshire cream, of Lea fishing is to be had. Of course, everybody knows Benningfield's House and nice gardens. Everybody has known it from time immemorial, for the father of the present proprietor was an enthusiastic angler, who paid strict attention to the water he rented. Carthagena Weir is a really fine pool, and, as may be supposed, it is in great request amongst the *habitués* of the fishery. There are not many bream in the Lea, but a few are generally taken from this weir, and also a few large trout. The largest bream I ever saw—three weighing twenty-one pounds—were taken here, and publicly exhibited when stuffed. For trout, however, you must go higher up the stream in the most rigidly protected waters. Of these there is a length of the river at Amwell in highest repute both as a trout and perch water.

Amwell Hill is, to my thinking, the centre of the Lea's

Digitized by Google

best scenery. Scott, the Quaker poet, laid on his colours rather heavily when he spoke of overhanging grey castles and romantic farms; he came much nearer nature in these lines:—

> "The pleased eye, which o'er the prospect wide
> Has wandered round, and various objects mark'd,
> On Amwell rests at last, its favourite scene.
> How picturesque the view! Where up the side
> Of that steep bank her roofs of russet thatch
> Rise mix'd with trees, above whose swelling tops
> Ascends the tall church tower, and loftier still
> The hill's extended ridge."

Walton's river runs through various scenes of history as interesting as its physical landscapes. King Alfred is said to have diverted the waters of the Lea with the benevolent intention of bringing the Danish fleet, which had proceeded in triumph as far as Ware, hard aground in the tideway, and at Temple Mills certain channels are pointed out as the artificial courses formed by the Saxon king. The Lea has associations also with Luton Hoo, Whethamstead, Brocket Hall, Hatfield Park, Panshanger, Hertford, famous from early Saxon times; Chadswell Springs, where an unpretending stone commemorates the opening of the New River Scheme in 1608; Ware, Cheshunt, Waltham Cross and Abbey, Enfield, Edmonton, and Tottenham.

Thorne tells an amusing story of Charles Lamb's tombstone, prefacing it with the remark that Lamb himself would have enjoyed it. Lamb was buried in Edmonton churchyard, in a spot which, only a fortnight before his death, he had pointed out to his sister as that which he would desire as his place of burial. Dr. Carey wrote the following epitaph on the stone:—

> "Farewell, dear friend! That smile, that harmless mirth,
> No more shall gladden our domestic hearth;

Digitized by Google

That rising tear, with pain forbid to flow,
Better than words, no more assuage our woe;
That hand outstretched from small but well-earned store
Yield succour to the destitute no more.
Yet art thou not all lost; through many an age
With sterling sense and humour shall thy page
Win many an English bosom, pleased to see
That old and happier vein revived in thee.
This for our earth: and if with friends we share
Our joys in heaven, we hope to meet thee there."

Thorne, in his tour of the Lea, was copying this inscription, when a couple of working men walked across the churchyard and read the lines with grave deliberation.

"A very fair bit of poetry that," said one of them.

"Yes," the other answered, "I'm blest if it isn't as good a bit as any in the churchyard—rather too long, though."

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VIII.

A MOORLAND LEGEND.

DREARIEST of all the spots upon dreary Quickmoor is the small town of Kingsford. Indeed it is not so much a town as a settlement, and its sombre character arises from the fact that it is a convict settlement. The surrounding prospects, to the rambler who has any sort of love for the beauties of Nature, cannot fail to please, though they are utterly destitute of the softer graces of an English landscape. The scenery is famous for its wildness, for its solitary expanses, for its rugged alternations of grassy waste and hills crowned with frowning blocks of granite.

The Government, searching for a region as far removed as possible from the busy haunts of cheerful men, fixed upon Quickmoor, creating a double solitude, and calling it a convict establishment. Hither were brought criminals born, criminals bred, criminals by accident, criminals by election; criminals doomed never more to mingle with their fellow-men; criminals sentenced to varying terms of punishment; criminals who, coming forth repentant, should, spite of the difficulties which an imperfect penal and social system built up in their path, strive to lead a better life, and

Digitized by Google

criminals in whom the iron of vice had been ineradicably welded by the very means which in others had brought forth fruits meet for repentance. Around the great central building there, planted on the barrenest part of the land, a small colony of necessity clustered, but there was not a house that did not indirectly reflect the character of the place. This was Kingsford, and no man of his own free will sojourned longer within its borders than absolute necessity demanded.

This, I am well aware, ought to be a chapter recording the capture of trout. But the particular day which I selected for a visit to Quickmoor was a pronounced blank —a hot, bright, still day, with all the brooks low and clear.

"Light another pipe, sir," said the old man, my guide and companion. "I'll tell you a story."

"About fishing?" I asked.

"No, not fishing," he replied, "but about Quickmoor," Certain qualms of conscience about introducing the legend into this book I have overcome, and will re-tell it. It may serve to pass away an hour at luncheon-time for some unsuccessful sportsman doomed like myself to a blank day on Quickmoor.

* * * * * *

One raw winter's morning the dull level of Kingsford life was stirred to its depths. The well-known signal had gone forth that a prisoner or prisoners had escaped. Warders armed with carbines marched forth in twos and threes; the few inhabitants who were not in the immediate pay of the Quickmoor prison aided in the hue and cry, and suspended their ordinary avocations to take part in the chase. Not many years before a notorious criminal had run away, and barbarously murdered a shepherd for the sake of the clothes without which he could never have got clear of the country.

Digitized by Google

Self-interest, if no other motive existed, would therefore prompt these people to become amateur man-hunters. Hence, within a few moments of the gun-fire which gave the alarm, Kingsford was thrown into a state of intense excitement. Boys were rushing hither and thither to bring in with all haste the rough, wiry little Quickmoor ponies from the pastures and outhouses; women assembled in the single thoroughfare of the village, questioning and magnifying, as they gathered or imparted intelligence; the grand entrance to the huge prison was surrounded by eager enquirers bent upon cross-examining any of the officials who might issue forth.

Within an incredibly short space of time the warders were scouring the moors, north, south, east, and west, under orders to bring in the runaways dead or alive. Every gully, every ravine, every boulder or tor likely to afford hiding, was ransacked with prompt completeness; every shepherd's hut on the hills, and every lonely vehicle on the highway, arriving from or passing down into the outer world was overhauled. The search was rendered the more arduous by the dense fog which wrapped everything in hoary, chilling gloom.

At the Kingsford Arms, the one hotel in the place, the true cause of the alarm was soon ascertained. The convicts had been marched out as usual to the occupations of the day—some working at the buildings which were being perpetually added to the main establishment, others at reclaiming the adjacent moorland for agricultural purposes. The warders were posted in their proper strength at the ordinary posts, and the silent labour of the convicts was proceeding when, as so often happens in those strange regions, a sudden mist arose, to develop swiftly into an impenetrable fog. This was the opportunity for which the discontented and

Digitized by Google

insubordinate among the convicts had waited, probably for years, and now was their time. Under cover of the friendly veil, three of the building gang contrived to elude their keepers, and one man in the field, taking advantage of the momentary surprise with which the officials in that corner of the settlement had been thrown, on hearing the signal, was equally fortunate.

* * * * * *

The supposition is that a convict is known only as a number, as an unknown quantity of the human family; but the actual names of the missing men were, in the course of an hour, being whispered in the bar-parlour of the Kingsford Arms. Here a courageous sportsman, making the hotel his head-quarters for the sake of the snipe and occasional blackcock and woodcock to be had on the moorland; a couple of commercial travellers, waiting for the vehicle which would shortly bear them into more welcome beats; and a warder or two off duty, were assembled, discussing the event of the day, and speculating upon the probable results.

One other member of this company has yet to be mentioned, though perhaps we should take her presence as a matter of course. It was Miss Western, the hotel bar-maid, waitress, and book-keeper, a reserved, ladylike, irreproachable person, who had fulfilled the multifarious and not always pleasant duties of her post with faultless faithfulness —courteous to all, familiar with none. For once, however, Miss Western's normal taciturnity was broken: there was no questioner more eager than she, until the full details had been told. It was to her that the prison official, over his luncheon-beer, gave the names of the escaped convicts, with such incidental additions respecting their crimes, characters, and behaviour during imprisonment, as would be naturally

Digitized by Google

interesting on so exciting an occasion, and there would be no doubt that the young fellow, overjoyed at the notice (so often sighed for) bestowed upon him by the ladylike barmaid, was more communicative than is or should be usual with his class. But even prison-warders, albeit they are warders at Quickmoor, are very human, and Mr. Sullivan was not the only uniform-wearing individual in that out-of-the-way place who had long entertained a sneaking regard for pale-faced Annie Western.

The young lady, having obtained all the information which appeared to interest her, disappeared from the room. All present had observed a sudden change in her demeanour when the alarm was first given. A face which is always white as death cannot be said to turn pale, but there was an indefinable change in Miss Western's countenance which seemed to intensify the normal pallor, an ashiness of lip, and a startled expression of the eye, which did not escape the observation of those who knew her best.

"I am afraid Miss Western is a trifle frightened over this," remarked the prison official.

"Dear heart, no," replied good Mrs. Preston, the motherly landlady of the well-ordered homely inn, "she is often like that."

And so the matter dropped.

By-and-by the fog lifted, and it was everywhere said that the chances of the convicts were now small. Hapless mortals! their hour of liberty had been brief, though not so bright as a butterfly's! The pursuers—many, and on their mettle—had been on the track from the first, and it required only a clear atmosphere to put an end to the man-hunt. It was not long before a horseman galloped past announcing a capture; then a carrier, urging his sorry hack into a dangerous trot that he might be the first bearer of the good

Digitized by Google

tidings, told the whole village, as he jolted by, that he had heard shots fired down the ravine through which Fairman's Brook leaps from stage to stage into the arms of the far-away lowlands. The general population deserted their homes, hastily assuming bonnet, shawl, and hat. The snipe shooter and the commercial traveller at the Kingsford Arms, the off-duty warders, everybody hurried to the top of the street, and across the patch of cultivated bog to the eminence which commanded a panoramic view of many miles of fair country. Apart from the crowd, and so intently looking towards the ravine that no one cared to interrupt her, stood Annie Western. Yes, there was one who ventured to speak to the lady—Mr. Sullivan.

"I was sure our fellows wouldn't miss 'em," he said, lightly.

"Do you mean miss taking or miss shooting them?" she asked, in a voice that quivered in spite of itself.

"Either or both," the man answered; "our orders are very positive. We call for surrender three times, and if that fails—well, there's only one thing left."

The latter words had been uttered gently and apologetically, for the speaker had been touched and awed by the girl's wounded, hunted gaze, and by her long-drawn "Ah! God help them!" Then, furtively observing, and finding his companion to be, to all outward seeming, in the statuesqueness of her countenance, unmoved as a stone, he began to comment upon what was passing before his eyes.

"Here's the first captive," he said, pointing to the emergence from a turn in the ravine of a slowly-moving body of men. "Whoever it may be, he's either settled or badly winged. Winged, very likely, for they come at a slow pace, and halt now and then to change bearers."

Before Sullivan had proceeded thus far, Miss Western

Digitized by Google

had started forward as if to meet the procession; then she resolutely arrested her movements, and paused stock still again. The warder this time did not follow her, and it was to the sportsman that he continued his comments.

"Oho!" he exclaimed, "this," referring to the approaching group, "is about the biggest scoundrel in the whole establishment. Do you remember the fellow who narrowly escaped hanging for that Southwark affair? This is the second time he has tried to bolt. Last time he nearly killed his warder with a hand-saw, and the poor chap will be maimed for life in consequence."

The Southwark burglar was just then borne past. He had been shot twice—once through the shoulder, once in the thigh—and, limp and motionless as to body and limbs, and ghastly as to countenance, seemed already dead. The crowd followed the procession, and before long a shout was raised that a cart was bringing the other convicts from another direction. This turned out to be true. A donkey-cart was driven at a walk within the walls, conveying back to their punishment two groaning men, from whom the prison surgeons would soon be extracting the leaden checks upon liberty. The ponderous gates harshly shut out sight and sound, and gradually the Kingsford housekeepers and their little ones dispersed. Miss Western had lingered until the three wounded men had gone in. It was with almost a smile that she said to Sullivan, in passing—

"They are the builders, are they not?"

"Yes," he said; "they were all working beyond the stone-yard yonder. We make use of artizans in that way. One of them is a very bad lot. The other two are good fellows enough, but I suppose they couldn't resist the temptation to run away."

The fourth convict, then, was not captured. The search

Digitized by Google

was thorough, yet the short duration of the fog had rendered it almost impossible that he could have escaped. Still, as the hours of the brief winter's day went on, the invariable news brought by droppers-in to the Kingsford Arms was that number Ninety-six could not be traced in any form or fashion.

The mystery was increased by the circumstances under which the man had succeeded in eluding the lynx-eyed chase. The builders had been favoured by hilly and broken country, affording an abundance of hiding places; the wielder of the shovel in the Reclamation enclosure could only have got away over clear, open ground, with no cover that would have concealed a dog. But got away he had, and that of a surety.

The three unsuccessful malcontents we may henceforth dismiss from our story. They recovered more or less slowly, and the Southwark burglar, it must perforce be said, to the regret of all the prison officials, was the first to appear once more in the ranks of the able-bodied convicts. Our concern is rather with number Ninety-six, the absentee.

* * * * * *

At the Kingsford Arms, after dark, on the day of the occurences above narrated, the snug bar-parlour was particularly well patronized. The shooting of three men in one day was not so commonplace an event that it could be passed over without special celebration. If the truth must be known, it threw dreary Kingsford entirely out of gear. The sportsman had not looked at his gun after the novel sport of which he had been an indirect witness; the commercial travellers had unexpectedly found it essential to make several calls on the following morning; an odd farmer or two from the outlying districts, and the straggling tradesmen of the village—all these assembled with one accord, as

Digitized by Google

soon as the candles were lighted, to have a night of exhaustive gossip. Each new comer stamped harder and harder on the outer door-mat, for the twilight had brought a blinding downfall of whirling snow.

"That poor devil who's out of quarters to-night will wish himself back again," remarked the postmaster, pointing with his pipe-stem over his shoulder to the north.

"Egad, he will," chimed in one of the commercial gentlemen. "What is he?"

"*What* is he?" repeated Mr. Sullivan. "It must be a clever man to answer that unless the bird's been brought back to cage. If you mean *Who* is he, I can tell you."

Some of the company said, "Ah! do;" others, "Oh! thanks;" others, "Your health, Mr. Sullivan." All sipped their liquors and listened.

"Number Ninety-six was rather a curious case," the off-duty warder began. "He was a tall, strong-shouldered young man, straight as a poplar, and when they had cut off his beard he looked as beautiful as a woman. We've considerably over a thousand convicts on the books just now, and thirty of them are what are called gentlemen. Number Ninety-six, however, was the most genuine of the whole set. We find some of your real high-born gentlemen cutting up very roughly; directly the veneer is peeled off you have a very ugly description of timber indeed to look at. Ninety-six is real grit though, and everybody is puzzled at his going off in this manner. But that is by the way. I said I could tell you who he is. Well, he's the son of old Sir Simon Tolly, the banker, and he was convicted of forging deeds and wills and other papers to an enormous extent. Of course you know everything now, as I thought you would when I mentioned the name; that affair, anyhow, wasn't done in a corner, for the whole country rung with the story,

Digitized by Google

and the newspapers for a month or so had room for nothing else. Now, the strangeness of the case is, that a good many people say he is innocent, or next door to it."

"Rubbish!" interposed the sportsman, "it was a full and fair trial, and nothing could be clearer than the evidence."

"Well, well," continued the warder, "I can't express an opinion about that; I only know that all kinds of people of quality have come down to this God-forgotten part of the world to see number Ninety-six, and that Harry Hinton, a brother warder of mine, says he knew the family and all their affairs, and can answer for it that there are things kept secret which would alter the complexion of the case considerably."

"And," said a farmer, who had returned to say that if he was to get home that night he must be jogging pretty soon, or he would be snowed up, "it always happens to be your gentlemen convicts that gets away. I dare say it's all right, but I never yet heard of a poor man doing it. No, no," he added, upon an angry exclamation from Sullivan, "I mean no offence, but it's the truth."

"Then it is not the truth," retorted the representative of the prison's honour, "the man who last gave us leg-bail was a low tinker tramp, and the one before that was that precious Cheshire farmer, who was no more a gentleman than—than —he is"—*he* being a pet collie curled up before the wide roaring fire.

The landlady, appearing at the nick of time, prevented a continuance of the verbal sparring which seemed imminent, and Mr. Sullivan, bidding the company good-night, whispered to Mrs. Preston as he went, and received, as if in reply to a question, "She is upset, I fear, and has gone to bed with a head-ache."

That was certainly a memorable night on Quickmoor,

Digitized by Google

and memorable above all at Kingsford. The heaviest snow-storm of the generation buried the country before daylight, and in the morning Miss Annie Western was missing. They searched high and low without effect until the postmaster delivered to Mrs. Preston a letter which had been slipped into his box during the night. It said :—

"DEAR MRS. PRESTON,

"Pray, do not make any inquiries for me. I am gone, I hope for good, but, be that as it may, certainly not to return again. You have been as kind to me as a mother, and would have been kinder had I allowed you. Some day, perhaps, I may see you again.

"Yours truly,

"ANNIE WESTERN."

There was no doubt about this note; the handwriting was the same finished specimen of caligraphy which, coming before them at this lonesome moorland hotel, used to excite the wonder and compliments of the tourist and official customers when they paid their bills.

For awhile the people around had so much concern with their stock lost in the snow, and their complete isolation from the world from the same cause, that they soon ceased to puzzle themselves about the strange disappearance of Mrs. Preston's courteous assistant. It was only to be expected that the disappearance of number Ninety-six should be coupled with it; but guesses, though plentiful, were unsatisfying, and by-and-by the wonder ceased.

* * * * * *

The escape of the convict Tolly, and the shooting of the other three runaways, strangely enough, excited no more attention in the country at large than could be measured by

Digitized by Google

a tamely-worded paragraph of twelve lines which appeared in the papers weeks after the events happened. Official reports had doubtless been dispatched in due course to the Home Secretary, but Government offices give to the public press only the information that they are forced to surrender. It was a tragedy that might have been made much of in the hands of a zealous "Special," but, through a fortuitous combination of causes, the public knew it not.

Yet it was tacitly understood at Kingsford that the two gentlemen who used to spend so much time at the little hotel, and write upon large blue sheets of paper, were important personages sent from London to make inquiries, and Mrs. Preston confided her suspicions to that effect to another customer, who came with his gun-case to Quickmoor, after the snow had melted. She found this young gentleman, whose letters were addressed "Horace Herbert, Esq.," very sociable, and extremely affable. He took much apparent interest in the affairs of Kingsford, and was fond of chatting with the warders over a cigar; but it was observed that during his week's sojourn his shooting expeditions generally ended in an empty game-bag, or in a total of snipe wholly inconsistent with the fame of the bogs. Wearily, at length, he packed up his breech-loader and cartridges, and foretold his departure on the morrow.

"We should have looked after you better, sir," the landlady said; "but I've never yet been able to fill up poor Miss Western's place."

"Indeed," answered Mr. Herbert, in the tone of one who was not at all interested in Miss Western, or the landlady's difficulties.

"Poor girl, she left sudden the very night when the convict went."

"What is that?" he said sharply.

Digitized by Google

Mrs. Preston repeated her information, and, as she spoke, produced from her stomacher a photograph. It was a picture of the Kingsford Arms, with Miss Western standing in the doorway, looking dreamily over the distant moors, while a pony-chaise and a party of ladies and gentlemen, postured in and around it, filled up the foreground.

The young gentleman, as the landlady subsequently remarked, gave a great gulph, as if he were determined to keep down any expression of feeling, and turned towards her with a forced calmness of face and voice that frightened her. "Where," he asked, "did you get this? Who is it?"

"It's Lawyer Brown, from Taviton, and his daughters," Mrs. Preston began.

"No," the other sternly said, interrupting, "the lady on the doorstep, I mean?"

"That's Miss Western. She was standing at the door on an afternoon last summer, and looking—as she was fond of doing sometimes for half an hour together—right away to the hills yonder: we had a rare laugh afterwards; for, quite unknown to her, a travelling photographer took her in the picture, and she never knew it to this day."

"Ha ha! good joke, indeed. Could you give me this, Mrs. Preston? Well, perhaps you would not care to part with it entirely; but I'll promise to get it copied, and you shall have it again."

The landlady, who had made demonstrations of disagreement with the proposal, was content with this, and was much gratified to hear, a few minutes later, that Mr. Horace Herbert had countermanded the four-wheel dog-cart, and had declared his purpose of remaining at Kingsford a day or two longer. He was an inmate of the hotel for several additional days, and was incessant in his inquiries about

Digitized by Google

Miss Western, and in his rambles with either Sullivan or the warder Hinton, who it has been previously suggested, was acquainted with the family affairs of the convict number Ninety-six.

* * * * * *

Some six weeks after the memorable snow-storm, Sir Berton Herbert, Bart., received a letter marked "private," and fastened with evident care by an ample supply of sealing-wax. It bore the post mark of the town nearest to Kingsford, the central receptacle for all the correspondence swept up by the Quickmoor rural postmen. This is a copy of the letter:—

"My Dear Father,

"I am sick and weary of the life of deception which this wretched business entails, and not the least repulsive portion of it is the necessity which the devil lays upon us of making other people deceivers too.

"Nothing whatever can be heard of our friend.

"It seems certain that he is not in this part of the country; equally unlikely is it that he could have escaped to the coast. The paragraph which appeared in yesterday's papers assuring the public that the convict Tolly has been seen in the United States, &c., is, of course, another mesh in the web of deception. But, I repeat, of him there is nothing to tell; the very prison officials are puzzled, and can express no opinion. So far my expedition has failed.

"But I have something that will pain you to know. Poor Alice, as I am convinced, lived at this inn—your daughter and my sister, Heaven forgive us!—*as a barmaid for two years!* and she disappeared mysteriously on the night of Tolly's escape. Deception again, you see. After that terrible trial and sentence, we, you may remember, received a letter

Digitized by Google

from her from Rouen, announcing her intention of spending the rest of her days in an Italian convent. While we were searching the continent for her, she was here as Miss Western, serving cider to the country folks, and waiting obediently upon any chance customer who required the ministrations of a barmaid.

"I will confine myself to bare facts. There is a warder here named Hinton, a private detective sort of person. I have discovered that he was induced to come here, in the pay of, and in constant communication with, Alice. He was unable to do much, but on two occasions he tells me he delivered messages, assuring the convict that she was in the place, ever watchful of his interests. 'Tell her,' he sent answer, 'my degradation is light in comparison with her sorrow; tell her she has my pity, for she has my love.' This man (Hinton) says it is impossible that Alice could have had any hand in the escape, and the statements of persons who observed the wretched girl when the wounded prisoners were brought in, quite corroborate this assertion. Hinton swears he, too, had nothing whatever to do with the matter. This we must take for what it is worth. It seems certain that Alice was taken by surprise; also that she is wandering in search of him.

"So far I have confined myself to facts, and you must pardon me if they have been put with apparent hardness. Pardon me, also, and deem me not wanting in filial duty and affection, if I betray a hardness of heart in what I have yet to write, for it is, alas, an inherited hardness. But for your obstinate worldliness, these horrors would not have accumulated.

"To you the behaviour of your daughter and my sister may appear but the madness of despairing affection. You know that her life was bound up in his, and you cannot have

Digitized by Google

forgotten how on that day when, in a frenzy of passion, she renounced you for declining to pledge yourself to endeavour to obtain what she termed a 'remission of sentence,' she declared that she ought to have been the convict, and not her lover and my unfortunate friend. When she overwhelmed you with reproaches as the cause of the crime, you pronounced her insane. Let me tell you the secret of the poor girl's blighted life. It was by her tempting advice that Tolly committed the forgeries. Until now this secret has been in her keeping, in mine, and in his; it is now in yours, as you may please. I am bound to state the full circumstances, for it was your obdurate refusal to sanction Alice's marriage with the man of her choice, because he was not possessed of sufficient wealth, that put the devil into her soul, and his. Alice, distraught with remorse, confided this to me herself in an interview more painful than words can tell. I shall not rest, nor willingly see your face again, until I have found the unhappy girl whose love has been so woefully disastrous, but for whom in this world there can be no more happiness.

"Although, as a man of the world, you may find consolation in the knowledge that my friend's sentence was legally just, this letter will doubtless cause you some pain. For myself, the bitter grief of the immediate past, and the dark cloud hovering over the future, have frozen my heart to ice.—

"Your dutiful son,

"H. H."

* * * * * *

The following communication was subsequently received by Sir Berton Herbert from Mr. Porsan, a confidential solicitor, who had been dispatched to a remote country village on a special mission by the hon. baronet:—

Digitized by Google

"DEAR SIR BERTON,

"I have, according to your instructions, proceeded to this place to inquire into the truth or otherwise of the statement made by the Rev. S. Marks, in reply to your advertisement offering a reward for information touching a certain missing lady.

"I am sorry to inform you that there is no room for doubt that the unknown lady who died here, as described by Mr. Marks, was Miss Alice Herbert, your daughter. I enclose a miniature of Mr. Tolly, an old note from him to her, and a portrait of her brother, Mr. Horace Herbert; these formed part of the deceased's effects. I enclose, furthermore, a document, written and signed by Mr. Marks, the incumbent of this parish. I have communicated this intelligence to the Hon. Mr. Herbert. Awaiting further orders,

"I am, your obedient servant,

"H. W. PORSON."

(*Extract from Enclosure.*)

"The deceased lady was found by a carter partly buried in a snowdrift by the wayside on the morning succeeding the great snow-storm of December last. She was insensible when taken to Manor House farm, where every attention was paid to her. As clergyman of the parish, I was sent for on the same day. On arriving at the farm I found that Doctor B. had succeeded in restoring suspended circulation, but the patient suffered much. During two days she rambled in her speech, and no information could be gained from her by which we could communicate with her friends and ascertain who she was, or where she came from. On the evening of the second day, Doctor B. informing me that the sufferer was dying, I at once repaired to the farm. It was but too evident that the sands of life were indeed fast falling. The

Digitized by Google

fleeting spirit was now tranquil, but the patient was too weak to speak. She signified acquiescence in my desire to pray with and for her, and listened with closed eyes to my reading. Before I had finished my sacred duty, the lady, with a quiet sigh, and a smile beautiful to look upon, passed away to the other world."

* * * * * *

In the spring-time a party of children set out from Kingsford to pick violets in Druids' Wood. As they walked down the road they halted to clamber upon the low stone walls to see the convicts working at the reclamation of the bog. The prisoners heard their merry voices, and turned away with downcast eyes as if they would shut out the sound.

Druids' Wood is celebrated far and wide as one of the most remarkable places in Quickmoor. Tourists, artists, and anglers who visit the neighbourhood during the summer months, always make a pilgrimage to it. Many of the country people, regarding it with superstition, avoid it, and its distance from any hamlet deters others from visiting the place. It is a grove of dwarf oaks of unknown antiquity. Though the largest tree is not more than seven feet high, the oaks present all the shapes and grotesque characteristics in miniature of perfectly-formed and extremely-aged trees. In the wood there is a thick tangle of undergrowth, and amongst the masses of granite strewed around, and gnarled roots, rare ferns and flowers are to be found. Primroses and violets in their season, and foxgloves in theirs, flourish profusely, and a day's flower-gathering is a treat often looked forward to by the little ones living near.

The flowers sprang up beautifully after the severe winter, and our party of children had heard of their appearance. Bright as the sunshine that bathed the moorland in soft

Digitized by Google

radiance, they ran from tor to tor, and from tree to tree, filling their baskets and pinafores with perfumed blossoms. Their pleasure was soon turned to fright. A little boy penetrating further into the thicket than his fellows, ran out into the daylight, with staring eyes and scared face. He said a dead man was lying there. The terrified children ran home and told their story, and in the afternoon the mystery of the convict's escape was solved. Number Ninety-six had secreted himself in the wood, and during the great snow-storm Nature had covered him with its own shroud.

So far as could be surmised, from a careful comparison of the Governor's report of the investigations made then and previously, the convict, taking advantage of the outcry raised by the alarm in a distant portion of the grounds, had vanished in the mist, and concealed himself in a trench close to the prison-grounds until the darkness of night favoured his journey over the lonely two miles of moor intervening between him and Druids' Wood, and the heavy snow obliterated all traces of the flight. It was strongly suspected that Hinton, the warder on duty near the convict at the time, knew something of the matter, but shortly after Mr. Herbert's visit to Ringsford, that official obtained leave of absence, on the plea of a sudden death of a brother, and had never returned.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE PEAK COUNTRY.

TWO hours ago, smoke, crowded thoroughfares, groaning machinery, and the very heart of a prosperous industrial community of nearly three hundred thousand inhabitants; now purple heather, far-reaching hills, shooting-boxes, grouse, snipe, and here and there a black-cock. Two hours ago the landscape was one of chimneys —a forest of them; now it is a warmly-tinted picture of mountainous moorland in Nature's matchless perspective. Two hours ago the air was heavy and dim, and your temples throbbed in unison with those wonderful machines that were pressing out massive armour plates and drawing steel rails from the roller as if they were bits of thread; now the atmosphere is, by comparison, preternaturally clear, and exhilarating to a degree which is best measured by the long-drawn gulp asked for by the greedy lungs. Two hours ago the ear was assailed by the shrieks, wails, sobs, groans, and bellowings that proceeded from some of the most famous metal works in the kingdom; here

"All the air a solemn stillness holds,"

save where the honey-laden bee softly hums herself a homely

Digitized by Google

tune as she crosses the road intersecting the moors. Verily, money-making men of Hallamshire, you may thank your lucky stars that your pursuits have fallen to you in such pleasant places. There are no other citizens in this proud empire who can in so short a space of time escape from depressing confinement into beautiful freedom; who can close their office doors at four o'clock, and by six be handling a newly-shot grouse instead of a banker's pass-book. Hard-working and grimy toilers, into whose philosophy neither pass-book nor grouse enters so much as in the dream of an idle hour, you, too, may be thankful that so near your grinding implements you have the flowery dells and ravines that give so much charm to the five streams which "one of your own poets," Ebenezer Elliott, knew so well, loved so much, and celebrated in such sweet song.

On the high-road between Manchester and Sheffield, in a hollow under the finest hills, there is a solid stone bridge. A grand coaching business used to be done between the metropolis of cotton and the metropolis of steel, and the Lancashire lads and Yorkshire tykes always found in the wild grandeur of the surrounding scenery some sort of compensation for the journey. Are any of those old coach travellers living now, I wonder? Not many, perhaps, for this was one of the earliest stud-farms for the iron horse. But there must be some who remember the half-way resting-place in the hamlet of Ashopton, nestling close under the bold peaks of Win Hill and Lose Hill; the loneliness of the situation, the grandeur of the prospects far and near; the river rippling under the bridge over which the coaches used to pass, and below which the Derwent receives the smaller stream that for some distance had appeared running parallel with the coach road; and the substantial larder of the hostelry.

Digitized by Google

Sportsmen also know the spot—sportsmen, that is to say, who hire their shooting from a distance, and sojourn in the district only so long as there is sport to be had—sportsmen, very often, who here, and here alone during the year, renew their bygone experiences of country life. At Ashopton and at Lady Bower, further up in the direction of Sheffield, you may always reckon upon finding a goodly selection of setters, pointers, retrievers, and spaniels, and a very miscellaneous collection of dog-owners, hanging about the inn doorways of an autumn evening, when the day's work is done, and when the sun scatters about the valleys and hill-tops shadows so mystical and weird that you may gaze at them, forming and re-forming, until, in the belief that a new order of spirits have come down from the rocks and caves to take temporary possession of the Peak country, you see visions of cloud-capped towers and gorgeous palaces rising out of the shroud-grey of the twilight. Should pleasure or business call you forth next morning before the sun has re-appeared over the east-lying landmarks, you may look down the valley from Lady Bower and watch the stately pageant dissolve like a scroll, and the old familiar outlines of tor and moorland gradually steal back again, real as the duties which daily life brings to responsible humanity.

To this district come tourists, but not in dreaded shoals. The country is a little too inaccessible for the common-footed variety of the modern excursionist, who loves to have his "special" run right into the novelty he has come out to see. A good walking or riding man with leisure at his command always loves the Peak, but it may be said that, as a general rule, the tourist, pure and simple, either stops short at Chatsworth and that part of Derbyshire which lies south of the line which you may draw from that noble Dukery straight across to Buxton, or pursues the railway from

Digitized by Google

Buxton over the elevated permanent way above Chapel-en-le-Frith to Stockport.

I have known travellers compassing this route declare afterwards the glories of the Peak country in the language of venerable experience. Now, if our friends can prove to you by affidavit that they have halted at Chapel-en-le-Frith, and pushed up into the high country thereabouts, you may grant them a certificate of knowledge on the subject, though you should withhold a medal in addition, unless they know something of Castleton and the country on the Ashopton side.

"Chapel"—the topographical designation is too long for frequent use—is not incorrectly described as "a market-town of some considerable importance in the High Peak." If not "in," it is not far from the Peak. At Hayfield, a few miles north, begins the range of hills of which Kinder Scout is the chief summit, and Kinder Scout must be honestly climbed by your own feet if you would gain that splendid look-out which, they say, sometimes includes the sea beyond Liverpool. Castleton is pretty well known to tourists, since it monopolises the most wonderful of the wonders of Derbyshire, such as the Ebbing and Flowing Well, the castle of which Sir Walter Scott had somewhat to observe in his "Peveril of the Peak" (the flower, as many think, of the Waverley flock), and the mines and caves where the Bengal lights reveal stalactite and crystal spar, and less showy illuminations intensify the gloom of awe-inspiring cavernous recesses. These are the show places of the district, and naturally they attract all the tourists who pass that way. Still the traveller who stops short of Mam Tor has but an imperfect acquaintance with the High Peak.

Let us traverse the mountain through the lovely vale of Edale until we stand once more upon that bridge which

Digitized by Google

spans the Derwent near its confluence with the Ashop. Shall I not do well to admit at once that I have brought you into the Peak country chiefly to take you by the button-hole and gossip of the streams that lave its lower levels? And is there not a cause? The rodster and the gunster coming with a purpose are the men who know most about the Peak scenery, for they have an incentive to spur them beyond the point where others retrace their steps; the further their explorations are forced the more successful are they likely to be in their pursuits. Yet the field is so vast that I cannot pretend to exhaust it; the best that can be done within the limits of a single sketch is to skim the surface with a light hand.

The Little Ashop, to which I have above made reference, is the tributary of a tributary, for the Derwent is, spite of its goodly size at its junction with the Trent, but a feeder of that magnificent midland river. The Ashop rises on the northern face of the High Peak, and is formed by a number of rivulets springing from Glossop and Alport moors. It is, however, too small a stream to be mentioned in ordinary guide books, or to be treated to more than a passing reference in the abundant angling literature which the Peak country can claim as its own. Yet it is a noted haunt of merry, if small, moorland trout, and is strictly preserved by a few gentlemen of the district. In most of the Derbyshire streams grayling abound; none, however, are to be found so far up as this. The water is too shallow for those lovers of deep, swift currents, and there are besides weirs which would, if they attempted to act upon the "Excelsior" motto, effectually check their advance.

Watching an angler is to one who understands the science almost as exciting and interesting as angling one's self. It brings out your critical faculties; it gives you a good

Digitized by Google

opinion of yourself, though at the expense of your friend; it teaches you something. This is why the old schoolboys on the great summer field-days at Lord's cricket ground assume such airs of wisdom, and wax so vigorous in their praise and blame as they follow with kindling eyes the movements of the youngsters in the field.

Suppose, then, we become spectators of the two gentlemen who are making ready for descent into the Ashop. The dogs leaping around them and sniffing at their heels as they cross the bridge are evidently jealous of the fishing-rods; they consider themselves defrauded of a day's work and glory on the moors, though, if they were gifted with reflective memories, they must recollect that the last week proved a dreadful blank, and that, eager as they were to point and retrieve, all the chances were against them. Therefore, faithful animals, you need not whine and look up so eagerly with those great loving eyes of yours; your masters are quite justified in looking after fish when fowl are scarce. Hie back again, then, to the stable yard and enjoy a day's romp and rest.

Our anglers have gone into the village smithy to don their wading stockings and brogues, without which nothing can be done; bushes, thick and overhanging, fringe each side of the stream, and if the gentlemen in the smithy know their business they will wade stealthily upwards, working with a short line. Up-stream fishing should always be adopted when possible: that may be taken as an infallible rule. It is pedantry, however, to insist upon the method under all conditions, inasmuch as there are rapid "torrential" rivers where an angler who values his time and temper, and cares for a basket of fish, will never attempt aught but down-stream long-line fishing.

Who ever knew a village smithy door without its brace or

Digitized by Google

so of idlers lounging against its lintels? Here are three young men, probably keepers taking holiday with the dogs; young men whose faces are the colour of a ripe hazel nut, and whose velveteen jackets are, like the garments of poor, easily-cheated Esau, savoury of the hunting grounds. They watch Messieurs the Anglers pull on their waterproof coverings, thick woollen socks, and clumsy brogues, and converse of angling news. No daily newspapers come to Ashopton till they are a few days old; there are no hourly telegrams affixed to club screen or hotel passage. Such news as the morning brings them is of the woods, fields, and streams. Number One has heard of a four-pound trout taken yesterday in the Derwent. The trio at once move with slow step across to the bridge, and lean over, gazing into the peat-brown flood as it races under the arch. This movement will not help them probably in their comprehension of the story, but it seems the natural thing to do, just as when Micawber contemplated entering into the coal trade he went out and looked at the Medway with the eye of a connoisseur. So our velveteen jacket brigade involuntarily survey the Derwent as the story-teller proceeds.

It seems that the four-pound trout had been a notorious character for several seasons. Everybody had made serious attempts upon its honour. Everybody had failed. Live fly, dead fly, ants' eggs, maggot, wasp-grub, worm, minnow, had been used in ringing the piscatorial changes, but the trout had kept his corner under the jutting rock, and had ordered his life aright, pursuing the even tenor of his way, turning neither to the right hand nor to the left. At length there had been treason and stratagem, and, alas! spoil. Nefarious prowlers had netted the fish in the dead of night, and sold him in Castleton at sixpence per pound. Number Two caps this story with another while our *trois frères*

Digitized by Google

dawdle back to the smithy, the dogs following gravely in a listening attitude.

A gentleman on the previous afternoon down at Hathersage was angling with gentles, and caught a small grayling, which he had pulled nearly out of the milltail when a great trout ferociously rushed at and gobbled it, taking the point of the hook also into the bargain. There was a dash of pathos in this narrative: the gentleman played the trout for half an hour, and then permitted it to break away from him.

It is very pleasant, sitting upon a newly-made wheelbarrow outside the smithy, to hear all this conversation, and look up and around at the many-tinted hills and village flower-gardens, to smell the wood fires, and hear the forge, the rustling branches, and the flowing stream combining in a sleepy kind of chorus. But our anglers are ready, and we have engaged to look on as umpires.

One of these fishermen might not untruly be termed a—if not the—judicious hooker. The first reach of the Ashop is between a garden hedge on the one side and a wall rising sheer out of the stream on the other. The water is low and clear; there is not a scrap of cover in its bed, except stones, lying for the most part flat on the bottom. The current is therefore tolerably even, and the course free for the up-stream angler. Wisely he uses a couple of flies and half a dozen yards of line. Wisely he moves warily, never splashing as he brings one foot before the other, pausing always for a minute or two on arriving at a new position. Standing above him the spectator can see every pebble in the river's bed, but not a fish within range of his vision. Yet stop. The eye kept steadily upon the river becomes attuned to the colour of the stony bed—a light brown, and soon it detects a long, thin, light-brown form where none

Digitized by Google

could at first be seen. It is a trout, so like in hue to the river's bed that only the practised eye can detect it. A hand lifted into the air scares it away, frightened out of its wits. The judicious hooker says it is precisely what he expected; the only chance is to fish under the wall, and under the bushes on the opposite side. Lightly, and apparently without any exertion, he drops the tiny artificial bumble in the direction he announced, and has his reward—a four-ounce brook trout in admirable condition. The J. H. cannot now expect to catch his four dozen as he did in the lucky June days, but he thins out the stock occasionally, and fishes the Ashop like a master, wind and water all the while dead against him.

The second angler is a superb illustration of "how not to do it." From his talk, as you lingered about the smithy, you would have fancied him an incomparable fly-fisherman; the advice he volunteered to the J. H. was sound, and delivered in a tone of easy confidence that suggested a limitless reserve of knowledge that might be used did not modesty forbid; the playful flourishes he indulged in, whipping at the scarlet berries of the mountain ash and flicking his cast across the road, as we proceeded towards the gate of the first meadow, were gracefulness itself.

"Here," we might have remarked without making absolute fools of ourselves: "here is a finished sportsman who may be backed to pitch a fly into a teacup at thirty yards distance."

His aspect when he looked leisurely towards the clouds, and up and down the stream, was that of profound wisdom. Perhaps his theory was quite regularly hall-marked; his practice was "Brummagem." Not to put too fine a point upon it, he was (in a Pickwickianly-Waltonian sense) an arrant impostor. Every movement was a false one. He

Digitized by Google

floundered about in the water, partly through too much haste, partly through carelessness in planting his feet, the result being to drive away the fish and to treble his own exertions. Wherefore, while his friend was cool in body and placid in spirit, he was perspiring and irritable, suffering, no doubt, mentally and physically from intense prickly heat. It was astounding to observe how heavily his flies pitched into the water; you could hear them fall. He tested every kind of shrub on the bank, apparently with the view of determining which would most effectually cause entanglement and loss of tackle; on the whole, the common bramble seemed best adapted for this purpose, though for a propounder of the question how it is possible for a line to become most inextricably fastened up, there is nothing like gorse. Need it be said that this gentleman caught no fish, lost much tackle, and came out of the water at the end in a vile humour, which the sight of his friend's pretty dish of trout did not affect on the side of sweetness and light?

When Sir Geoffrey Peveril, in the flush of hope, suggested to Master Bridgnorth the possibilities of the King investing him with a title as the reward of his loyalty he remarked that "Earl of the Peak" would sound well. That earldom has never been bestowed, but there is a modern Waltonian lord of the Peak who is known to all fishermen on Derwent, or Dove, as "Old Butcher." This "character" has been thus charmingly described by Mr. John Hall, a Sheffield gentleman, who has written much of the Derbyshire rivers and hills, and who can angle as well as he can write:—

> "Old Butcher is young: though he's nigh fourscore
> He can tramp twelve miles across a moor;
> He can fish all day and wade up stream,
> And at night as fresh as the morning seem.

Digitized by Google

"Old Butcher is young: he can make a fly
With as steady a hand and as sure an eye
As though he were still in manhood's prime,
And never had known the ravage of time.

"He will drink his glass and despoil a dish
With an appetite keen as any fish
That ever took grub from baited hook
When hunger its victim overtook.

"He can spin a yarn, or a sermon preach,
Or on special occasions spout a speech:
He can fast or feast, like a monk of old,
Though he likes the latter much best I'm told.

"In the summer time when the days are long,
He will rise with the lark at her matin song:
But never a day's too long for him
When wetting his line by the river's brim.

"Yet on winter nights, when the weather's cold,
And fuel and victuals are scarce as gold,
He will dress his flies in his moorland cot,
And live on potatoes and murmur not.

"He knows each pool of the streams about,
And every stone that conceals a trout;
Some say that he knows all the fish as well,
Both where they were born and where they dwell.

"To those who have wander'd in Baslow's vale,
Through Chatsworth's meadows and Darley Dale,
Or skirted the banks of the silvery Wye,
Where Haddon's grey towers rise steep and high;

"Or straying westward by Calver's weir,
To Hathersage, Hope, or Edale fair,
Where the Noe and the Derwent wind at will,
Beneath the shadow of great Win Hill;

Digitized by Google

"His form and garb will familiar seem
As the guardian deity of the stream,
With his oval face and his grizzly locks,
And his smile like that of a sly old fox.

"His vocation is, to instruct the young
Novitiates how the fly is flung:
To rig their tackle and range their flies,
And show them where to obtain a rise.

"Long may he live to pursue his art,
For few are there left to succeed his part:
And when he is gone let his epitaph be—
'Here lies George Butcher, rare fisherman he!'"

Mr. Charles Cotton knew these Peak streams intimately, and was no doubt an accomplished fly-fisherman. His essay "Being instructions how to Angle for Trout or Grayling in a Clear Stream," is not such a smoothly-flowing dialogue as that of his "most affectionate father and friend," Walton, perhaps because he was—

"Surprised with the sudden news of a sudden new edition of your 'Complete Angler,' so that having little more than ten days to turn me in and rub up my memory . . . I was forced upon the instant to scribble what I here present to you."

The styles, however, are different: there could not be two Piscators. Between the two dialogues there is as much difference as between a brick building of the Dutchman's era and a weather-stained farmhouse thatched, gabled, and slashed athwart with black oaken beams. Nevertheless, Cotton is an excellent authority on Derbyshire fishing, and requires very little editing from the modern expert. The streams which he lauds as the finest in Europe for angling have deteriorated, though they are still amongst the best

Digitized by Google

that remain for trout, if not for grayling. At Bakewell and Rowsley the wandering angler may purchase his daily ticket, but the best portions of all the streams are rented by associations or small bodies of gentlemen who carefully watch their fish.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER X.

NOTES AT BRIGHTON.

THE meet at Southwick is generally a favourite one. The leisurely ride of four miles along the Shoreham road braces you up. The Channel is hard by, deliciously open, and surging over upon the unlovely strips of waste that will some day doubtless be covered with "elegant mansions," marking the certain westward advance of London-super-Mare. We are, in truth, so near the salt water that the thorns in the hedge curling inland describe a distinct semicircle, as if each bush had resolved to turn its back upon the sea, and point with its outstretched finger, "This way to the Downs."

Next to the clean-shaven lawn on the opening day, when the squire keeps open house for red-coats and black-coats, gentles and simples alike, there is no place so appropriate for a meet as the village green. The hunting men like it, the ladies in the carriages blocking up the high-way prefer it, the pawing hunters, I fancy, are aware of the superiority of the frame in whose picture they are the fore-ground figures, and you may be sure the dogs have no con-

Digitized by Google

scientious objections. Their sleek forms and satin skins show well upon the bright-coloured turf which they bedeck like a flower-bed.

Here at Southwick Green, moreover, we are close to the scene of action. The Downs, it is true, are but half developed, being nothing more than spent waves of undulations by the side of the massive billows that beckon us towards the glorious Sussex uplands. We can see the upper spars of the schooners and brigs in Shoreham harbour, can hear the murmur of the sea above the bustle incident to meet and start. Within two minutes of moving from the Green, the harriers are scattering, nose to ground, and, with but little fuss or noise, as becomes their race, setting about their business. Carriages and gigs are drawn up along the path at the bottom of the field; the horsemen are for the most part posted by the rails dividing the fallow from the turnips, into which the dogs eagerly range. Their wagging tails and bodies, rising and falling amongst the dark green leaves, look for all the world like a flock of agitated geese floundering out of the way.

The huntsman, satisfied that there is nothing to be done here, calls his beauties across to the fallow, where, as so often happens, from a form which every one of us must have scanned a dozen times, it being, as you might say, close under one's eyes, a hare is unexpectedly discovered. She discovers herself, in fact, by leaping up and fleeing for her life, while the shouting of the boys and men, the sharp cry of the harriers, and an involuntary movement among the riders proclaim that the sport has begun. The hare, seeming to think there is more safety in humankind than with the dogs, makes straight for the line of carriages, runs actually parallel with them, and so near that any one of the coachmen might slash her with his whip. Within a few yards of

Digitized by Google

the cottage she turns at one of her favourite right-angles, and speeds equally close to the waiting horsemen. We can observe her distinctly—her frightened eyes, her appealing glance, the shadings of her dark autumn coat, the determined laying of her ears.

Did you ever see a hare in full flight? It is only when she is hotly pursued that you have the opportunity. It is a very different thing from that epitaphed Tiny, whose

> "—— Diet was of wheaten bread,
> And milk, and oats, and straw;
> Thistles, or lettuces instead,
> With sand to scour his maw."

It is a very different thing from the lanky-legged, awkward-looking animal that scrambles into the copse when you are taking your evening cigar in the cornfield. These Down hares understand well how to get over the ground and elude the enemy, and they are better able to do so than the covert and what is called the "homeless" variety. Our Southwick puss has shot into the turnips like an arrow, the excited rustics having, to their credit be it said, given strict obedience to the chorus of "Keep still, boys," which arose on every side. The urchins therefore drop the stones which they had picked up, and every one of us—ladies no less than gentlemen, children as much as adults—watches the disappearing creature with shockingly hungry eyes. If we, by a sudden impulse, desire her blood, so, by alike instinct, do the harriers.

The leader is pushing through the turnips, and the rest of the pack, close and compact as a comet's tail, follow him. In due time we pursue, not at the dashing charge of the fox or stag-hunter, but with the calculation which every sensible rider after hounds will exercise over stony, wet

Digitized by Google

fallow. You seldom require heavy galloping with these harriers. Tact serves better than speed.

It is impossible to say when and where the hare will double, but double assuredly she will. Some members of the party appear to be quietly cantering off the field, away from, instead of after, the quarry, and they are most likely to be well in the running when the fly-away has turned and twisted according to her nature. She is now making for the up-country, and we may use the spurs after all for a brief spell, while the hare dashes along the ridge, descends a valley of soft rich pasture, and, skirting the rearguard of a flock of Southdowns, seeks refuge in the friendly swedes. By what process does she know that here, more than anywhere else in this north-easterly wind, will the scent be in all probability destroyed? For an hour she pursues this policy. Hunted in the fallow, she escapes to the rapefields.

Note how splendidly the harriers work. They never lose their heads. Baffled many a time, they yet plod on with infinite patience, requiring scarcely a word of direction. Other hounds charge forward in a mad career; the true-bred harrier keeps himself, as it were, strictly in hand, meeting the cunning of the game with a corresponding artfulness and wiliness of his own. Perhaps it is because the frequent pauses on high ground, and the circles in which the pack manœuvre, afford us unusual opportunities of observation; but it does seem that no class of hunting-dog so largely claims our admiration for persevering and unobtrusive intelligence as a well-trained pack of beagles or harriers.

And what an astonishing distance you may travel in these alternate gallops, trots, and pauses! Now you are away amongst the springy turf, dark clumps of gorse, and iron-grey weather of the Downs, with the murmur of the distant

Digitized by Google

sea, by this time nothing more than a suspicion, and the ships, houses, and offing, a grateful panorama behind. You then descend until you regain the old landmarks, only by an unexpected and rapid change of front, to find yourself erewhile once more advancing farther upward and onward than before. Very little fencing or leaping of any kind is called for in this description of hare-hunting; you may, of course, make an opportunity of taking a flying leap if you choose, but, as a rule, if you know how to ride neatly up and down steep ascents, and at high speed if necessary, you need not be afraid of following harriers.

Somehow, there are generally a few pedestrians who always contrive to be not far from the hunt. As you wait for a draw on the verge of field and enclosure, and the horses take breath, those gentlemen on foot soon come toiling bravely up, having by knowledge of short cuts and the probabilities of the chase, kept the hounds in constant sight. At this work it is with men as with horses—the best stayer does the trick. The race is not by any means to the swift only.

On these far-reaching Sussex Downs we have no reason to complain of too many hares. An abundance of them complicates the scent, and this is almost as bad as no game at all. Happily, we are in that proverbially desirable condition of having neither poverty nor riches. Our huntsman views the killing of the first hare to-day with intense satisfaction, not so much because she baffled the pursuit for more than an hour, as because she makes up the sixteenth brace this season. It must not, however, be supposed that hare-hunting is always so peaceful and slow, as it must be held to be in the main, by comparison with other forms of field sport. There was not long ago a most memorable run almost straight ahead, from near Shoreham to Devil's Dyke,

Digitized by Google

over such a tremendously hilly country, that not many of the gallant sportsmen, who, smart and fresh, witnessed the finding of the hare, were visible at the finish.

Sometimes the meet is at Patcham, near finely-wooded Sanmer Park; sometimes at Ovingdean, dear to affectionate equestrian couples anxious to escape from the public scrutiny of King's Road promenaders; sometimes at the hamlet of Hangleton, with its ancient church and more ancient manor house; sometimes at Halmer, Thunder's Barrow, or Water Hall Brow. Of course, to those who follow the harriers as an excuse for getting into the country, and breathing the atmosphere of the Downs, as much as for purposes of sport, there is no place equal to the Devil's Dyke. Once let the surprising prospect open beneath us, and we desert the field forthwith, for to linger behind in the hunting-field is virtually to put yourself once and for all out of association with the more eager followers. By easy stages we reach the crest of the verdurous Downs, whence at one entranced sweep of the eye we take in, on a level of six hundred feet immediately beneath, an expanse of pastoral England, which, for diversified beauty and limit, east, west, and north, cannot be matched in any part of her Majesty's dominions.

In the late summer, when the corn-fields are white unto harvest, the very earth seems to smile in plenteous gratitude for mellow sunshine and ripening fruits. On a day like this, when we stand on the threshold of winter, and a stony coldness hangs between earth and sky, this magnificent pictorial map of, it is said half a dozen counties, wears a new and not unattractive face, albeit it is a sombre aspect that impresses you with the force of foreboding. Before it you turn shivering in your saddle, while the keen wind, which Charles Kingsley lauded if he did not love, but which the

Digitized by Google

common world denounces, whistles around with icy effect, though a few minutes since, when you breasted it in the glow of healthy exercise, you exulted in defying its power.

When, by and by, this incomparable stretch of fertile plain is hidden far and wide with virgin snow, it requires something more than the otherwise welcome horn or hound-cry to entice you from your lofty stand-point.

But at present there is one horseman who is called away from the scene of action; for this is to be a day of beast, fish, and bird. So, steady, bonny chestnut, until we reach the bottom, and then rein shall be drawn no more till home is reached.

* * * * * *

The casual visitor to the Brighton Aquarium runs through it in much the same way as some of our Transatlantic kindred are said to run through Europe. His aim is to "do" and not to study it. To get all that is to be got out of an aquarium, you must be there, now in the morning, now at noon, now at night, with a heart sealed against the seductions of music, refreshment-buffets, or company. Thus you may observe the fishes in their moods of dulness and of liveliness, in their conditions of hunger and satiety, in sickness and in health.

The people who pay the Brighton sea-lions a visit, probably find them in the water, looking, I dare say, pretty much as usual. Dropping in at a very early hour one morning I saw the lion—that is the male creature—under, to me, peculiarly agreeable circumstances. He had not gone into the water, but lay on the rocky edge of the tank, very sullen and unhappy, probably not having yet got over his long journey from California. The seasonable dryness of the atmosphere had dried his skin, and instead of the

Digitized by Google

shiny tarpaulin coat which the ordinary visitor would see, he presented a soft jacket of well-furred seal-skin, of a golden brown tint. The keeper tried to rouse him, but he lifted up his shapely head and made the place echo with a cross between a howl and a roar. It was tremendous, and not at all a cheerful noise. The sight of a dead herring induced him at length to come to his keeper, but an attempt to fondle set him snarling and roaring viciously, and in the process he exhibited a formidable set of teeth. Then he went back to his rocky ledge, sulking as before. The lioness, as we must call her, had from the first been gambolling merrily in the water, and was evidently in the best of health and spirits. Little, however, is definitely known of these curious members of the seal family. The captives sleep in a snug railed-in enclosure, some distance out of the water, and they huddle together in the straw like a pair of loving children.

But this is by the way. We are bent upon another visit to our older friends. The first tank in the main thoroughfare of the aquarium is the home of the anemones; and they are a splendid variety. Many of them were taken from the bottom of the *Great Eastern* by Mr. Henry Lee, who found about three hundred tons of mussels and other mollusca clinging to the big ship. Those cream-white specks upon the interior of the glass are fragments of the anemones' feet: it leaves them in crawling across, and each speck will eventually develop into a full-grown specimen. The anemone sometimes runs counter to the wishes of the aquarium managers; they prefer to plant it in the best position for public admiration, and it has a weakness for shrimp-capture.

The symmetrical bright-hued boar-fish used to be thought the rarest, as it is certainly the most tropical looking, of British fishes; but it has now been proved to be plentiful on

Digitized by Google

the Cornish coast, and is invariably found in the month of July. It is not easy to acclimatize mackerel; out of five thousand perhaps only five may be saved. Strange to say—and this is an argument to be remembered by anglers in anticipation of the time when they will be prosecuted for cruelty to animals—the hooked fish thrive best. There is only one of the original mackerel left in the aquarium; and this having reached a period of aldermanic fattiness, is not at all an Adonis amongst its brethren. Yet, once acclimatised, no fish thrives better than the mackerel, though we have no right to expect them to live longer than three or four years.

The happy family of the aquarium seem to be the showy black bream. They keep socially together; and when the patriarch wishes to approach, I have seen them divide right and left, after the manner of ballet-girls, when the chief dancer comes on from the rear. The basins formed in the pebbly bottom have been scooped out by the male breams; At each a fish takes up position until his female friend has been persuaded to deposit her eggs there. Should another interfere, the jealous sentinel, forgetting his gravity, promptly attacks it, or the whole troop, if necessary.

The salmon tank generally disappoints the uninitiated, for there is only one fish that looks its character. It must not be forgotten that the experiment of keeping the salmon in a salt-water tank has not yet been fully worked out. The oldest fish (about five pounds weight) has reached the critical period when it will be demonstrated how long a salmon can live in salt water. Its juniors, too, are to be subject to experiments to show what difference is made in transferring them from salt to fresh water, in imitation of their natural habits.

Why are there no grayling in this or some other tank?

Digitized by Google

It is a pity our old friend the original porpoise died. He had a fine sense of humour, and often played the Merry Andrew. He ate his twenty herrings a day with infinite relish; and would come to the keeper at the sound of the whistle. (Who shall say after this—for the porpoise, though not a fish, lives under the same conditions—that fish cannot hear?) After seven months of perpetual motion, he died, without any apparent cause, deeply lamented by all who knew him. Another lived five months, and succumbed to abscess in the liver. Then a juvenile porpoise was put in possession of the immense tank, and after driving the rock whiting out of their wits by his rapid charges into their tanks, he died at the end of his first week's tenancy.

The little Muscovite delicacy, the sterlet, is quite at home in this country. Though these fish travelled 1400 miles before leaving their native land, not one was lost. Observe the prettily-marked spine of this fish, its line of silver beads down the side, its lightly-shaded fins, and its small white tip-tilted snout.

A gentleman has just sent a seasonable present from one of his Petworth lakes—a quantity of fat carp, tench, and eels, and three pike that must average twenty pounds apiece. These shark-like brutes have as yet refused to feed, but when they become accustomed to the place it will be very summary jurisdiction that will be meted out to any roach, dace, chub, or gudgeon that may be let loose amongst them. The pike are splendid fish, and after you have watched their wolf-like eye you need feel no compunction in using a large spinning flight when next you go out pike-fishing.

The larger bass cannot be induced to eat heartily, and therefore look meanly amongst the bright-coloured shoal of smaller specimens. The topers occupying the apartments of the defunct porpoises are well worth watching; though

Digitized by Google

some of them are five feet in length, they dart about graceful as a swallow flying to the eaves, now skimming the ground, then with a turn of their strong rudder-like tail, shooting swiftly to the other end of the tank. If you have a chance, observe how they dispose of the herrings with which they are fed; you may then believe anything of the sanguinary shark, to which they are allied by family ties.

The ever-popular octopus may be seen to excellent advantage in the table tank. A comrade was put there, but the bulley brother drove it out. Mr. H. Lee, in his interesting work on "The Devil Fish of Fiction and of Fact," gives a very vivid description of the peculiar amiabilities of these bandits, and all one's observations lead one to the conclusion that at close quarters it would be wise to refuse their friendship on any terms.

* * * * * *

From fishes we pass to birds. About a couple of miles out of Brighton, on the Dyke road, may be noticed, on the right hand, a long, solid, newly-erected building, lighted by sky-lights only. It might from its appearance have been a drill-hall, a windowless schoolroom, or a mysterious place of worship; it is, in reality, the private museum of a gentleman of independent means, who, from his Harrow days to the present time, has spent his time in the shooting and preserving of birds. Curiosity was naturally excited in Brighton by the gradual progress of the strange-looking building, and there was quite a rush for the admission cards which were, in process of time, by favour granted at certain hours of certain days to inspect the wonders it contained.

To say that this is an exhibition of stuffed birds is not enough, for it is the largest and best set up collection of British specimens that has ever been made. Mr. Booth, who

Digitized by Google

has thus devoted his energies to scientific pastime, has here accumulated more than three thousand, many of them very rare birds; and as there are two hundred and ninety distinct species represented, but few individuals remain to complete the ornithology of the British Islands.

How a sight like this sets a sportsman, whose opportunities are not equal to his zeal, longing to scour the coasts of East Anglia, to make fowling raids upon the wild islands of Western Scotland, to punt warily with heavy duck-gun about the broads of Norfolk and Suffolk, to range the health-giving downs of Sussex, to plod through the desolate and damp fen country. By these toilsome delights alone this magnificent display of birds has been gathered together. Norfolk, it is no secret, is the ornithologist's happiest hunting-ground. Where else would you be likely to find this spoon-bill, Paget's pochard, Bewick's swan, ruff, shore-lark, Temminck's stint, and, over and above even these *rara aves*, this fine specimen of the stork? None familiar with sport on those dreary broads will be ignorant of what these birds mean to the fortunate fowler; they mean long nights, cramped and frozen, lying in wait amongst the forests of reeds which whistle and moan dismally in the winter wind, and many a return to quarters unsuccessful and dispirited.

Next to Norfolk, Scotland has furnished the most and the best birds. There are goat-sucker, gold crest, shield duck, pintail, grey crow, buzzard, greylag goose, shag, black guillemot, greenshank, scaup, and many others from the islands off the coast of Ross-shire; others from the moors and forests of Sutherland, Perthshire, and Haddington. Rock and sea birds are brought down from the Bass Rock and Fern Islands; Sussex has furnished smaller but no less interesting varieties.

Digitized by Google

Having got your birds, the next proceeding is to set them up, so that no outrage, as is so common even in public museums, be done to science. What can be more ridiculous than to place your tree-birds on the ground floor, and your ground-birds at the top of the collection? No such error is here committed. The collector has called in the carpenter, scene-painter, botanist, and geologist, to aid him in showing, so far as might be, the *habitat* of each species. Each case is therefore a landscape picture in miniature.

Take an example. Grass, actually brought from the spot, is seemingly growing from between the stones and hillocks, over which a bramble bush, wonderfully true to nature, is spreading its prickly branches. From one of the sprays an anxious little titlark is dropping a green caterpillar into a young cuckoo's gaping mouth, while in the background the titlark's mate, looking pertly on from a higher perch, appears only half-consenting to the transaction. There are insects on the bramble leaves, plants amongst the undergrowth, and all are strictly after nature. This studious care is apparent in all the cases. It is difficult to realize that those are not real jays in a real poplar; that the slimy wood-work with its rusty ring, the marine vegetation and refuse shells which make a background for the phalarope are not the actual corner of the Shoreham oyster pond, of which it is a fac-simile. Sometimes the effect is dramatic, as with the carrion crow, black as night, upon a snow-white bank, waiting for the death of the wounded teal, which is crawling into a hole, with leg draggling and wing outstretched. Sometimes it is comic as with the four barn owls, sitting in a model—copied stone for stone and timber for timber—of Chiltington Church belfry.

But apart from the strikingly natural attitudes of the birds, and the photographic spring, summer, autumn, and winter

Digitized by Google

scenes of which they are the chief objects, we have many an illustration of how the ways of Providence are fitted to birds as well as to men. The mature sheldrake appears in his beautiful markings of black, white, chestnut, and carmine; but he can take care of himself. Not so the brood; and there you may espy the little creatures amongst the sand and brown seaweed, to which they are so assimilated in colour that you would never discover them if they lay close. The difference of plumage at different seasons of the year, and at progressive stages of the bird's growth, are always, where possible, illustrated. Most remarkable of all in this respect is the ptarmigan, represented (as shot in Perthshire), in three aspects. In summer we have them amongst the boulders of the moor; the cock, a handsome black and white fellow, with showy scarlet top-knot like comb, the hen so like a grouse that none but a naturalist could distinguish the one from the other. It needs, however, no special knowledge to observe how appropriate these colours are to the grey stone lichens and stunted heather amongst which they are now feeding. Next we have the ptarmigan family in autumn, they have changed, like surrounding nature, to a sober grey. The gay cavalier that erstwhile lorded it so bravely has become a Quaker, conscious of his altered condition. Lastly, come the winter birds, with cocks and hens alike white as the snow on which they stand.

This is the kind of principle upon which the entire collection (which is not yet, however, complete) has been set up, and sufficient has been indicated to show that while it is a unique collection of British birds, it is also a charming picture gallery, and an instructive school of natural history. In other words, it is a work of genius.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XI.

*WINTER AT HAZELBARN.**

THERE are certain long-standing town friends of mine who affect or really feel concern at what they term my exile at Hazelbarn. They can understand that life in quiet country quarters is tolerable enough in the bright summer time, and they say so. Two poets amongst them talk of the birds, flowers, dews, and showers; one notorious lotus-eater babbles of a wide-spreading elm, under which he has sipped cooling drinks and smoked many pipes of peace; others, who are gourmands, are not dead to the charms of duck and green peas, of strawberries newly gathered, and cream fresh skimmed. It is the winter that chills the marrow of their comprehension.

Perhaps it is because I am not an out-and-out country gentleman, a veritable squire, who must perforce learn that property has its duties, etc., etc., that I am thus pitied. There is something in that I fancy.

The man who, like Smythe Smythe, Esq., on the hill

* A statement by Farley Fenwick, Esq., formerly of Gray's Inn Square.

Digitized by Google

yonder, where the castellated mansion looks with a hundred eyes upon the open south, keeps his one, two, three stables of horses, and his servants galore, has, at any rate, *primâ facie*, a better chance of killing time than the elderly exile who possesses only a cob, and a small one at that, and a man-of-all-work who is everything by turns but nothing strong. The squire, too, has been born and bred in the country; is, so to speak, acclimatised. The tenant of Hazelbarn stepped out of the London streets pretty late in life, with ten thousand pleasant Bohemian memories to haunt and tempt him.

Will you listen to the manner in which winter passes at Hazelbarn? I promise to make no reference to the Snow King, or Rude Boreas; on my word there shall be no quotation from Thomson's *Seasons*, nor from Cowper's *Winter Walk at Noon*. It is no question of forefinger *à la* Johnson; nothing more than an effort to answer once for all the everlasting "How *do* you manage to live through the winter?"

First, then—the curate helps me to survive the trials of the long months of short days; so does his wife. Between ourselves, I am fonder of the wife than of the husband, and they are both aware of that interesting fact. The curate fishes a little; his wife shoots—in moderation when there is a fear of parishioners intruding, and in earnest when the coast is clear.

"A nice little body," I find to be the general verdict upon Mrs. Green Vernon, and it would not be a bad description from a person who knew her as a merely nodding acquaintance.

To her intimate friends she has a nice (but not a little) mind as well, and I should certainly like to see the man who, fairly knowing our curate's wife, would not adore her.

Digitized by Google

This laudation is not so much out of bounds as may be supposed, for as the Green Vernons live not more than one plough field, a rape patch, and half a paddock from Hazelbarn, we pass a good deal of our time in company. The worthy pair always spend their summer by the sea-side; therefore to me they are part—a very essential and distinct part—of winter.

The little woman receives the fortnightly boxes of books from Smith's, opens them, and reads their contents for the husband's benefit, and mine. There is at the parsonage a fine billiard-table over the harness-room, and the curate and the exile, while the north-easter performs a series of rattling cannons with hail-stones on the window-panes without, work the red with considerable frankness on the green cloth within. Mrs. Green Vernon, tuning her voice to the click of the balls, and making astonishingly clever use of the pauses, thus reveals to us the literature of the day, partly by analysis shrewdly made, partly by extracts beautifully read.

Brave little woman! I have seen that curate's wife, on a December day, sitting on the stump of a fallen tree from which we had brushed the snow, and reading the leaders of the previous day's papers while her husband and the exile, by the river's brink, looked ruefully at the floats which would not go down.

And it is really astonishing how deeply one may, at a retreat like Hazelbarn, become absorbed in matters, especially matters literary, which in the old days would pass by as the things which you respect not. Your mental respiration, as it were, is more greedy. But, more I think than by the books, the happiness of Hazelbarn and its inmates is fed by the more or less regular arrivals per post of the periodical literature. Thanks to the universal diffusion of

Digitized by Google

a taste for amusement and knowledge, we have these newcomers almost every day in the week, quite apart from the daily newspapers. The great days, however, are Wednesday and Thursday, when we receive those mid-weekly peepholes into the world and its secret doings which make everybody so wise; Saturday, when the pictorial papers and most of the weeklies arrive; and Sunday, which is sacred to that welcome journal which no man living in the country can do without.

There is a Mede and Persian law as to this newspaper which no one at Hazelbarn dares disregard. On Sunday morning when I descend (at half-past eight in the winter with great punctuality) into the apartment which the ladies will call "*the* study," that record of sports, pastimes, and rural pursuits must be in its place on the little long-legged reading-desk, sewn by certain nimble fingers, and carefully cut with a gigantic paper-knife kept for the purpose.

This dear friend in type (typical friend, perhaps?) is a godsend in the winter, because you have not only the enormous bulk of the current number to digest and make notes upon, but all the long articles from back numbers which have been carefully put by, like the good wife's preserves, for winter use. Why, at this moment I have enough of miscellaneous travels in that publication to last me till the second week in January; and there are natural history and angling papers in addition that will keep me going till Shrovetide. Even at Hazelbarn one must be methodical, and my method is to read the *Field* every Sunday morning during breakfast, and thence till church-time; also before and sometimes after dinner.

In the summer, when one gets out of doors as much as possible, the advertisements, which are always singularly interesting, albeit they do sometimes tempt you to break

Digitized by Google

the Tenth Commandment, are of themselves sufficient to engross you till the placid call from the grey church-tower floats leisurely and clearly, with jackdaw accompaniments, over the fields, and filters musically through the fir plantation outside the kitchen-garden. The actual news which, like that other staff of life, should never be too stale, will occupy the rest of the day's leisure. You may, nevertheless, judge what an accumulation of wholesome Sunday literature is piled up by the season when we have thrashed the walnut-tree, laid bare the flower-beds, and put the winter crops in order.

Shooting must not be omitted in the list of aids to preservation during winter at Hazelbarn, though we do not rely upon this as half so indispensable a pursuit as angling, of which more presently. It does one's heart good, about the time when the first frosts pearl-powder the fields and hedge-rows, to behold the curate's wife approaching, her good-humoured face made more florid by the November atmosphere, and her heels crunching upon the gravel as if they meant business. She has come over to tell me that they are come.

"They" are the fieldfares.

We—she, the curate, and I—are fond of a day with them as soon after their arrival as may be, and Mrs. Green Vernon always assumes the duty of keeping her eye upon their movements. Last year, bless her heart! she was as angry as she well could be with the chattering visitants for appearing so early as the middle of October, and she was angry because in the preceding year we had entered into a tremendous argument in which she contended that the fieldfare *never* arrived in this country till after Guy Fawkes' Day. Naturally, when on the 20th of the next October we came upon a great flock feeding upon the berries in the hawthorn

Digitized by Google

grove, where, earlier in the season, the nightingales pitch their orchestra amongst the May blossoms, we said nothing about the dispute. But the argument was not renewed.

Fieldfares, in the absence of better game, let me tell you, are not to be despised by an amateur sportsman; and, under the same conditions, they are not to be despised as an article of food. Not that Mrs. G. V. is an amateur. Very occasionally we, by favour, get a day amongst the partridges, pheasants, and hares: rabbit shooting is a standing sport. The river gives us water-fowl by fits and starts, and the water-courses harbour snipe. She can shoot them all with a cleanly aim.

The curate's wife, it should in justice to that estimable lady be stated, shoots with a sweet little gun manufactured on purpose for her from the design of her father, an old country gentleman who taught his children—boys and girls alike—to shoot and ride as soon as they could handle a gun or sit in a saddle. With charming logic she therefore throws the responsibility of impropriety, if any there be, upon her father; always distributes the contents of her game-bag amongst the poor; never takes anything except on the wing, and never allows her rambles with gun and friends to interfere with her domestic and parochial duties. She is chagrined to find that her position, as the curate's wife, entails upon her the necessity of great caution, and, to some extent, deception.

Sometimes she has to hide her gun under her Ulster coat, and once a cow boy, attracted by the crack, crack, of her tiny breechloader, leaped through the hedge and discovered a strange tableau—parson's wife on the fringe of the turnips, leaning upon the barrel of the smoking weapon, parson and parson's friend returning triumphant with a brace of defunct partridges that had been grandly dropped right and left.

Digitized by Google

But the lady was equal to the occasion. As the boy looked on with mouth wide agape she gracefully handed the gun to me, with the observation—

"There is no necessity for me to hold the gun any more, is there?"

The curate overcoming the man, Vernon glanced a reproach at his wife. Assuring herself that the rustic was beyond hearing, she said, demurely—

"Well, Charlie, I've heard you say there may be occasions when it is right to do evil that good may come. I don't say it is right, dear, but that it may be."

I wonder whether the lady saw that approving wink passed from Charlie to me.

The curate, by the way, doesn't shoot. His eyesight is not good, and if the truth must be told he is, as the world would esteem him, rather a milk-soppy gentleman; a capital fellow, of course, and all that sort of thing, but not a person who would be likely to run King Solomon very close in a competition of wisdom. Stuffing birds is more in his way than shooting them. Mrs. G. V. says she would never have followed the sport of fowling had not the desire been fostered by a genuine love of natural science. The amiable couple consequently divide the labour; she brings down the game, he sets them up, and the collection of feathered varieties at the parsonage is as interesting as it is valuable.

As an angler, the Rev. Green Vernon is distinguished more by enthusiasm than by cleverness, but he is a capital angling companion when you know him so intimately that you can speak your mind as plainly as circumstances render necessary. In other words, the reverend fisherman wants rousing occasionally into an atmosphere of common sense. His line somehow has a provokingly natural tendency to foul mine; the splashing of his bait is enough to scare away

Digitized by Google

all the fish in the river; if there is a possibility of upsetting the bait-can, or treading upon the coils of his or my line, or snapping the top joint in a tree or bush, he is the man to take the utmost advantage of the situation. But he fishes courageously right through the winter, never flinching from rain, snow, wind, or frost so long as there is a chance of sport; he is, in a word, one of those peculiarly-endowed natures that will turn to angling as surely as the needle turns towards the Pole.

I know he, like myself, reads the *Field* every Sunday morning before service, at least that department which concerns angling, and once he preached a sermon upon the miraculous draught of fishes. It was a marvel of piscatorial research, with a spiritual "tag" attached for the sake of appearances. He had ransacked the British Museum for information respecting the Sea of Galilee, and after numerous consultations with me over a pipe, produced to his puzzled parishioners a list and technical description of the fishes known or supposed to swim in that historic lake. These he rolled off his tongue with all their Latin nomenclature, and his final conclusion was that the fish which broke the apostles' net was of the bream family, though, as he carefully explained, not precisely the same kind of bream as that caught in this neighbourhood.

As I am known far and wide hereabouts as a man who thinks of little else but fish and fishing, the congregation focussed their gaze with one consent upon me during the entire sermon, appearing to think that I must have had something to do with that beautifully-portrayed fishing picture of eighteen centuries' imprint.

The winter fishing in our neighbourhood is extremely good; not that it is better than our summer sport, but, being pursued under difficulties that well become a man,

Digitized by Google

it is more creditable to the sportsmen. In the summer we have bream, and all the coarse fish, with available trout in a nobleman's park five miles across country. In the winter, we have pike, plentiful and large, in the river, and perch to match; the same fish, under other conditions, are to be had in one or two ponds which the owners of the estates in which they are situated, kindly place at our free disposal. In times of hard frost, the ponds are literally sealed, but the river is seldom frozen, and never in every portion, though it has none of your runaway currents that hurry through the land with a flash, and a roar, and a sweep, and a tumble, until sobered by the stealing fingers of the salt tide into which they are soon absorbed.

Hazelbarn being eight miles from the nearest railway-station, and the river a mile from Hazelbarn, we have a monopoly of the angling. You may mark the course of the river by the sombre line of pollard willows that have stood on picket-duty from time immemorial. Here we have holes of fourteen feet deep close to the bank, and a general depth that would everywhere take in a seven-foot man to the neck. The stream is always steady, and there are curves in the banks, and backwaters formed, it might be thought, expressly to invite the prowling pike and perch to lie in wait for unconsidered trifles passing innocently by.

Last winter, the curate took an eighteen-pounder, and I two twelve-pounders, or thereabouts, on the same day. Generally, however, we are amply satisfied with a brace and a half a-piece of fish that shall not be under five pounds each. Perch-fishing depends upon the suitability of the weather for bait capture. We rarely take them spinning or trolling, although every enticing phantom, spoon, and shadow eel that ingenuity has devised has been tried. Only at rare intervals will they look at the live minnow,

Digitized by Google

which is commonly supposed to be an absolutely fatal lure. What our Hazelbarn perch prefer in the winter is a lively gudgeon, and first of all a stone gudgeon. Now, gudgeon require a considerable amount of trouble, if you have to get them by yourself with a cast net, and hence it frequently happens that when the curate's wife comes down, as she will be certain to do in all weathers, about one o'clock, with something appetising in her reticule, and something to tell us of London news, and recent books, she finds us fretting and fuming at our ill success with the net. When either of us captures a two-pound perch—and that is no novelty in this part of the world—the two families sup together, taking turns at the parsonage and Hazelbarn.

And a perch night is always a musical night. We have the perch boiled in his jacket, scales and all; the music is both instrumental and vocal. Parsley and butter is invariably served up for sauce with the fish; Mrs. Green Vernon or our grown-up daughters play the accompaniments in the warm, lamp-lighted sitting-room. The perch thus eaten is a delicious morsel; and somehow we have all got to associate that brightly-vestured fish with "Ring out, Wild Bells," "Cleansing Fires," "Come into the Garden, Maud," "The Heart Bow'd Down," and so on.

Discussions of the most furious kind took place between the curate and myself upon the vital question of spinning *versus* trolling. The curate being a stout, and therefore somewhat of a lazy man, is partial to live baiting with gorge tackle; I stand by spinning or trolling, chiefly the latter, because it is found to be the most killing, as it is the easiest plan for our particular river. You must never lay down general rules for angling. We have fought this battle for four winters now, and on the threshold of a fifth we are fighting it still. Last Christmas Day, of all others, we made

Digitized by Google

ourselves a nuisance to the ladies by wrangling about flights, and dead gorges, swivels and traces, "across the walnuts and the wine," and never were friends more in danger of falling-out than were we on that day of peace and goodwill. The curate brought down an old college chum one January for a day's fishing; he knew as much about the gentle craft as any living creature, and he began to tell us, in the bosom of our respective families too, that we were not worthy of the name of sportsmen, if we essayed any method but spinning, or snap-fishing with live bait. Poor Vernon's spirit was disquieted within him.

Next day we put our theories to the test. Our severe mentor certainly spun the water like an artist, yet caught nothing but an inexperienced jack of two pounds. The curate took three fish, of about fifteen pounds total, with his everlasting double hook threaded under the skin of a lively roach. Sticking perseveringly to my dead gorge, working it quietly first close under the bank, and then by gradations across the river, I killed seven fish that weighed thirty-five pounds odd. The mentor did not like it; but the argument was over thenceforth.

Ha! there is the postman's horn. The light of his dog-cart lamp flashes like a will-o'-the-wisp, as he descends the hill. He will call first at the village, and then come on to me by way of the parsonage. Unfortunately, I must bring my gossip to an abrupt termination, conscious that having dallied with my subject, from sheer love of it, I have not half described how we pass the winter at Hazelbarn. There is no help for it; this manuscript must be delivered to the postman at the garden gate, in half an hour's time.

Else I would have taken you up into the granary, and shown you how much occupation one finds overhauling and sorting the seeds, and projecting the brave bloom they shall

Digitized by Google

make next spring and summer, or tending with jealous watchfulness the store fruit which lends such a powerful but mellow fragrance to the apple room. We might have smoked a cigar in the greenhouse, as I do every day, marking the daily condition of the slips and cuttings. There are the celery beds, too, and the kitchen garden generally, which must be looked after summer and winter alike. We might even have gone out with the gun, and brought down a rare bird, though that expedition would have answered better in the later winter. My neighbour's farm, out-houses, deeply-littered yard, folds and pig-styes included, I should have entered in my catalogue of aids to winter life at Hazelbarn, and there is certain literary work in the lower drawer of this table that will justify and repay the patient toil of many a winter evening yet to come. Pruning and planting, with respect to the trees and shrubs, must also pass with a mention. Here, again, one is conscious of the penalty—for of course there are some drawbacks—of the leisurely gossiping habits which Hazelbarn promotes.

Do I then, after all, conclude with a regret, and consequent justification of that concern which my long-standing town friends affect or feel? Most assuredly not. Let me protest—but, there is the horn again with a much nearer blast; yet hurrah for winter at Hazelbarn!

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XII.

MEMORIES OF THE NEVA.

ONE of the new sensations a stranger visiting St. Petersburg for the first time experiences, is a difficulty in reckoning time. In chronology, if in nothing else, Western Europe is a fortnight ahead of the great Russian Empire. It thus falls to my lot for the first time to celebrate two New Year's Days within the space of a month. It is New Year's Day in St. Petersburg, and the people are blithe and merry, as is their custom on the occasion. Thirteen days ago—although in these strange surroundings it seems as many years—I "saw in" the New Year amongst my own English kith and kin, and now I have a second time watched the departure of one year and the advent of another, not under mistletoe and holly, but in a sledge. We literally rang out the Old and rang in the New, but it was with the musical tinkle of sledge bells as we bounded over the snow.

Three individuals make a very comfortable party for sleighing, that is to say, comfortable, if the three are of the same sex, and there is no necessity to remember that a

Digitized by Google

third person is frequently an undesirable institution; and our New Year's Eve party was of the right composition. We stepped into the sledge just as the Russian Old Year had entered into its last hour, and was approaching its dissolution amidst a moaning and sobbing of bells from many a dome, the deep musical boom of St. Isaac's rising grandly above them all, as if to bid them take heart of grace for the good time coming.

All the gay city was astir. During the afternoon I had spent some time in that wonderful conglomerate of curiosity shops, the Grand Bazaar, and had been amused by the Russian juveniles, waddling about in their furs. The scene brought to mind other similar wanderings of a recent date through our smaller home bazaars, where English children laughed and chattered, clapped their hands at the toys, and looked wonderingly at the Christmas trees. That is precisely what the Russian children were doing yesterday, with the difference, however, that though children are pretty much of a pattern all the world over, the Muscovite youngsters, as I saw them making the round of the huge mart with their parents and guardians, seemed preternaturally grave and silent.

Towards evening, the weather, which had been strangely "green" for the time and place, became colder. Light snow flakes drifted crosswise in the air, and there was frost in the breeze. Unfortunately the streets were not in the best of order for sleighing, nor would they be until there were several inches more of snow. With frost, even when it amounts to the three or four degrees which we then had, a little snow certainly goes a long way, but if it is not soon replenished it wears out, so to speak, with constant traffic, and lays bare the palpable ruts and hollows of this city on a swamp. However, we were bound across the Neva, and had

Digitized by Google

been assured that in the suburbs the snow was thicker and better packed than we could reasonably expect it to be in the busy thoroughfares of the town.

Sleighing with one horse is very well in its way, but if you would take the amusement in its major form you must have, at the lowest computation, three steeds, and all the better if you can make the number four or six. In our case we contented ourselves with a *troika*. The horses were a capital match as to colour and size, black as ravens, possessed of long flowing tails and manes, arched necks, and fiery nostrils, and each was of that long, slender, wiry build to be seen nowhere in such perfection as in Russia. The middle horse stood in the broad, bulging shafts, carrying the arched bar and bells over his head; the two outer animals ran almost loose, one slight trace alone attaching them to the sledge.

Muffled up considerably above the chin, trussed and stuffed and tucked in beneath the furs and rugs, away we went. The Nevski Perspective was full of sleighs; it had been full of sleighs all the day. The excitement was exhilarating indeed, as the low-lying vehicles shot here and there with the lights streaming upon them, the lively choruses of the sleigh bells doing their best to make common cause with their louder-tongued fraternity of the church belfries. It would seem that services were being held in many places of worship, for as we darted by we could catch sight of illuminated interiors and masses of empty sleighs around the entrances. In the Nevski—three miles long though it is—the sleighs were countless. Every specimen of the delightful little vehicle was out. Tearing and raging, thoroughbred steeds snorted in your ear, and passed on like a flash of thought, escaping collisions only by a hair's-breadth, but never harming or coming to harm. Who the occupants were the rapidity of the pace concealed,

Digitized by Google

almost as much as the costly sables, but as the elegantly-painted equipages whisked abreast of us silver laughter sounded like sweet music. Next came the humble sleigh with a family party packed in after the manner of the suburban Cockney on Sunday afternoons and holidays. Then the dapper turn-out of the "swell, or the solid high-set family sledge of some "vitch" or "off."

We had not proceeded a mile down this thoroughfare of thoroughfares before we discovered that we had another lesson to unlearn. Is it not a proverb that the Russian drosky, or sledge-driver, is the most reckless of Jehus, and that neither life nor limb is safe in his hands? To be sure, as the Isvostchik strides his queer perch, takes a rein in each outstretched hand, bends forward his body, and shouts and gesticulates, he looks uncommonly dangerous; to be sure, also, when at the rate of eight or nine miles an hour you glide before, athwart, behind, and between other sledges going at a rate equal to your own, it looks a most dangerous business. Notice, however, that all comes right; that the beautiful horses which approaching from behind touch you on the shoulder, or breathe into your ear, never bite, never run you down, never wince, never falter; that the driver pulls up short and sharp and sure at a yard's distance; and that, above everything, the horses, notwithstanding their appearance of fire and rage, are perfectly trained and docile, and the drivers as careful as any passenger with robust nerves would wish them to be.

At last we reach the banks of the famous Neva. We have passed by acres of palaces, through long, straight, well-lighted streets, and now debouch from the rear of the Czar's winter residence upon the so-called quay. There is a roadway slanting across the icebound river. Its course is marked out by fir trees planted at frequent intervals, and

Digitized by Google

lighted by lamps filled with oil. In the brief and severe frost which set in early in the winter the Neva froze, within a few days, to a thickness of three feet, but not till recently has the ice been thoroughly safe. Some few weeks ago a party of thirteen sleighers were drowned not far from the spot upon which our three highly-mettled steeds dash with a bound of pleasure from the shore. It is an uncanny thought that beneath you the deep tide is rolling rapidly seawards, and that you are far beyond the reach of help should an accident happen. Thick as the ice is, there is, moreover, an ugly cracking sound under the dozen hoofs. The Neva at this point is no wider than the Thames at Westminster Bridge; but our roadway taking an oblique direction gives us a full half-mile of glorious, gliding, noiseless, express speed. The long rows of lamps in the distance, the palaces lighted within by myriads of wax-candles, the snowy prospect, the blue shadowy ice of the river where the wind has swept it bare, mingle together in a strangely-enchanting picture.

Soon we are amongst the islands formed by the two Nevas and the branch canals. An icy wind blows, and but for the sleigh-bells a weird silence prevails around. There are festivities in progress in the houses by which we flit in the starlight, but the fingers of the great artist Frost have been weaving delicately-designed curtains over the window-panes, and the candles within only serve to reveal to the best advantage the fantastic tracery. In the summer, when there is no night to speak of, these island retreats are the popular resort of all classes; but now the gardens are shrouded in the white wrappings of a long recess.

Returning to the Neva we face the wind; it comes down the river, and brings volleys of hard-frozen sleet, aimed point-blank at such slight portions of the face as we expose.

Digitized by Google

Across the Neva again we speed at over twelve miles an hour, the middle horse trotting magnificently, and his companions swinging forward at a proud, stately gallop. It is three o'clock on New Year's morning before we once more enter the Nevski, but the whole city seems as much awake as ever. Masquers are returning from their revels, family parties are hurrying home, and so, glowing with health, and our cheeks tingling again after the prolonged salute of the frosty night wind, we bid each other the compliments of the season, and congratulate ourselves that at last we are about to experience what an honest Russian winter really means.

* * * * * *

There was a good deal that was interesting for an Englishman to see in St. Petersburg yesterday, and much to remember with pleasure but for the vile slush which everywhere prevailed. It is meet that this latter fact should be placed in a prominent position, because thereby hangs an observation. Yesterday, the 6th of January, according to the Old Style, was the day when, with solemn pomp, the waters of the Neva are blessed by the Church in presence of the Imperial Family and the Ministers. It is an annual occurrence, and one which the poorer orders of the city regard with veneration and awe. Attached to the ceremony is the tradition that if winter have not set in before it must make itself felt on this particular day. An elderly Russian gentleman assured me that he had never known hard frost and snow to fail on the 6th, although the morning might have been one of unnatural mildness.

Three days ago it thawed incessantly, and a fine rain made the atmosphere as moist and miserable as the ground under foot. The sledges bespattered you, and crossing the street invariably plunged you ankle-deep in melted snow

Digitized by Google

strongly seasoned with mud. Next morning there was no change, and when it was found that night fell and the midnight of the Red-letter day had arrived without a sign of frost, the superstitious surprise was general. During the evening a wretched, half-hearted kind of snow fell, but it seemed ashamed of the dirty thoroughfares upon which it alighted, and, soon changing to sleet, subsided into the normal rain.

The ceremony of blessing the waters was to have taken place at eleven o'clock in the morning, but, as the dense crowds assembled to witness it found to their discomfort, there was a delay of nearly two hours. To only a few was the cause of the stoppage known. The first stage in the blessing of the waters is a service in the chapel of the Winter Palace, attended by the members of the Imperial Family. When this was concluded, and before the second part was begun, the Emperor received intelligence that Marshal Berg, the ex-Governor of Poland, whom he held in high esteem, was dying. The Czar at once ordered his carriage and hurried to the General's house, where he was informed that the gallant old soldier had breathed his last.

Opportunities were afforded me of viewing the ceremony from one of the windows of the palace, a privilege I remembered with longing when, preferring to see what a Russian crowd was like, I was buffeted and squeezed, and nearly poisoned with rancid sheepskins and garlic perfumes. The discomfort, after all, was scarcely compensated for by the experience purchased. A crowd is a crowd all the world over. The Russian rough, however, is a superior being to his English brother, for the simple reason that the Russian, like the German, police stand no nonsense with him. If he is offensive, or supposed to be so, they knock

Digitized by Google

him down, and then remonstrate with him, if indeed they think it worth while to supplement a blow with a word.

And what a tremendous crowd it was that gathered on the banks of the Neva to see the waters blessed! The river front of the Winter Palace is separated from the pavement of the embankment by a broad road, along which, except upon the spaces which the police and soldiers kept clear, human beings were closely packed. The ice of the river for half a mile square was kept clear of people also, but on the free portions, and on the bridges, and buildings around the Exchange, there was nothing but black swarms of human heads to be seen. At a moderate computation, from the spot where I was wedged in, the eye could roam over two hundred thousand persons, without approaching in either direction the limits of the crowd. The police and soldiers, including a number of mounted men who exercise the functions of both, were considerably fewer than would have been seen in the streets of London on any great public occasion. The crowd was wonderfully well-behaved, and gave one the impression of being really impressed with the business in which it was taking part.

On the Neva's bank, opposite the central entrance of the palace, an imposing, if somewhat gaudy, octagonal domed structure had been erected. This kiosk-like shelter had cherubs on its panels, sacred pictures on its upper part, and a cross to surmount the whole; while the exterior of the dome was painted blue, and sprinkled with golden stars, after the manner of Russian churches. The faces of the vast multitude seemed turned by involuntary consent towards this centre, and their expression was that of marked thoughtfulness. At times, when patience and the rain had been in operation for a couple of hours, the crowd would surge, and perhaps break bounds, and then the officers

Digitized by Google

would howl and yell themselves red. Yet nowhere was there horse-play, or unseemly noise; nor could I conceive a crowd, composed, too, let it be understood, largely of women, in which there was so little talking. There was a considerable admixture of the very poorest people, of both sexes, who wore the heavy, unsavoury sheepskin tied round the waist with a strap, and did not generally lead you to suspect that their expenditure in soap was excessive. Here and there a private soldier, in some strange uniform, mixed with the spectators; but, putting these out of the question, the main features of the crowd were those with which we are all familiar at home.

Shortly before one o'clock a sudden hush passed over the masses of people, and in a moment every hat was removed. It was something to command one's instantaneous respect to see this reverent act, which would have been performed with equal alacrity if, instead of a drenching rain, a dangerous frost had prevailed. Devoutness begets devoutness. Perhaps I am a bad Protestant to say it, but nothing within my observation has ever borne with it the conviction of actual devotion so much as the services of the Russo-Greek Church, and perhaps to this we may attribute the marvellous attention the ignorant Russ pays to religious observances. Just as your sledge-driver in passing a chapel, shrine, or picture, will drop his reins und cross himself, these rough-looking spectators bared their heads, and went through the thumb and forefinger signs and tokens enjoined by their faith.

The quick eyes of the crowd had caught a glimpse of the procession emerging from the palace door. A priest, wearing his white hair and his beard long and curled, walked first with a burning lamp. A second held a crucifix aloft. Two banners appeared next. The priests slowly descended

Digitized by Google

the two or three steps upon the sanded road, and walked across to the kiosk, raised some eight or ten feet from the ground. A gorgeous pageant was thus heralded by the burning lamp, cross, and initiatory banners. Long lines of priests walking two abreast; columns of the highest officers in the Russian army, blazing with uniform and accoutrement; a forest of banners, whose poles were terminated with cross-shaped gilded spearheads; more priests of the higher rank in the rich white and gold, and with the streaming hair, tall stature, and dignified appearance characteristic of the Greek priesthood; choristers in maroon robes—these were the main features of the splendid procession moving slowly across the road and ascending the canopied structure, where candles were burning in readiness for the service.

But there was something more brilliant still to come. The grand-looking and grandly-attired Metropolitan and his associates had passed on, preceded and followed by high officers of State; the choristers had filled the air with ravishing vocal music. All this had appeared like a dream of the middle ages. And now came the Czar, and the Prince of Wales in his English general's uniform; the Czarewitch and the Duke of Edinburgh; Prince Arthur and all the Grand Dukes and Grand Dukes' sons with their equerries. The priests wore their head-dresses; every other person in this remarkable assembly remained bareheaded in the raw rainy weather.

The Czar of Russia, the heir to the English throne, and all intermediate persons, to the meanest peasant that sweated under his dirty sheepskin, paid the ceremony the honour of at least outward respect. From a hole in the ice, battered in for the purpose, the water of the Neva, in a golden bowl, was brought to the venerable Metropolitan, by whom it was

Digitized by Google

blessed. It was handed to the Emperor, and he, having sipped thereof, returned it to the priest filled with half-imperials—one of the two golden coins in the Russian currency. Then, with a bunch of evergreen—hyssop, it was said, but myrtle apparently—the bystanders on the platform were sprinkled, chanting meanwhile proceeding from the choir. At this time the priests, the Imperial and Royal personages, and the candles, crucifix, and other glittering objects used in the ceremony, were hemmed in by a ring of banners planted on the ground, reminding one most forcibly of some of the pictures of Arthurian times, a fancy all the more natural inasmuch as some of the banners had been reduced, by battle or age, to dingy rags.

The waters blessed, the procession, always glittering and stately, returned slowly to the palace, while the fort over the water thundered a salute of 101 guns. In past times the people used to plunge into the river, and mothers craved no higher boon than to immerse their little ones in the icy flood. So many persons were drowned or frozen that the practice was discontinued, and now the devotees only pressed anxiously forward to carry away bottles full of the sacred fluid from this their Jordan, and carefully preserve it in their households. They believe the blessed waters of the Neva will stave off calamity and cure disease.

* * * * *

Thanks chiefly to the eccentric and effective method pursued by Peter the Great in his desire to give his country rank in the maritime world, every Russian schoolboy, though ignorant of other things, is certain to know that he must be proud of the Russian navy. At an early age the lad is taken to the cottage down by the banks of the Neva, and informed that long, long ago the great Czar lived there, in

Digitized by Google

his island workshop. He is taught to bow to and cross himself in presence of the miraculous image of the Saviour, which was said to have accompanied the Emperor in his battles. He is bidden to notice and admire the sturdy little boat which Peter built, the tattered sails black with age, and the stool upon which he would sit at his cottage door, looking upon the broad Neva as it hurried out to Cronstadt. The Naval Museum contains innumerable relics of equal interest and of much more educational importance. The history of naval architecture finds a practical embodiment there in the models and designs so carefully arranged and docketed. The golden spire outside is surmounted by a ship under full sail, and that is an indication of what the museum contains. Nothing is wanting, from keel to truck, to illustrate the science and history of shipbuilding. There is a complete model of the Russian iron-clad fleet. In a hall beyond that which displays the models, etc., there is an apartment devoted to objects of curiosity, including dummy sailors as they appeared in Peter the Great's period; portraits, sea views, and carvings, and specimens collected by Russian ships from every sea; while ships of small burden are built at the dockyard of the Admiralty, the frigates are constructed on slips lower down the river.

* * * * * *

A pleasant memory is that of a skating festival given by one of the Neva yacht-clubs, in their grounds. I can scarcely trust myself to describe the fairy spectacle those gardens presented. Entering the outer gates, and passing through the ante-rooms where furs were left and skates adjusted, you suddenly found yourself before thousands of dazzling lights. When the first bewilderment had gone, and things began to shape themselves clearly, the full beauty

Digitized by Google

and novelty of the fête grew. It was a large lake, dotted with small artificial islands, connected by rustic bridges, and covered with trees. Chinese lanterns and variegated glass lamps were suspended from the branches, and in caverns and recesses, most artistically arranged, gigantic shells, as they seemed to be from a distance, were illuminated from behind by coloured fires, each device formed from solid blocks of ice. These were placed so as to terminate a vista.

The skater, skimming across a space in shadow, suddenly found himself with a powerful limelight streaming upon him, and far in his wake; or conspicuous in the midst of a blue, red, or green halo. These soft, ever-varying illuminations gave a charming colour and effectiveness. Two or three hundred ladies and gentlemen were on the ice; all "select" citizens, and the majority of the skaters, especially lady skaters, I should say, were American and English; a good honest Glasga' dialect I undoubtedly heard in one of the fairy grottoes. A Welsh family was there to my knowledge, for I had the pleasure of using the skates of one of the younger members; French dialogue and Russian compliments mingled everywhere.

A gorgeously-decorated arbour, half hidden amongst trees, was occupied by a band, which played the best music in the best way. It was a sight to be gazed upon, and an exercise to be taken part in for hours without fatigue. Graceful as swans the young girls, arm in arm, or hand in hand, in twos, threes, or fours, flitted through the streams of light to the strains of Verdi; or, with partners of the other sex, whirled and wheeled to the music of Strauss. All was motion, and the poetry of motion. A slight thaw had set in that morning, but the ice was in perfect order, swept as it was perpetually by an army of liveried attendants.

Digitized by Google

A contrast truly to the modern rink, by daylight, and in the dog-days!

* * * * * *

A military spectacle in St. Petersburg means a peremptory stoppage of the main thoroughfares, any thoroughfares in truth required for the passage of the soldiers. At ten o'clock the Nevski and its principal feeders were under martial law. The gendarmes, who performed the duties of mounted police, and who were as military as any of the soldiers, never permitted you to argue or explain. Before a preliminary word could be uttered they would make a vicious pounce at your horse's head, and send him another way with choice Muscovite oaths. Different regiments were drawn up in different squares and streets, waiting for the order to march towards the Winter Palace. The main body of the troops mustered in the Isaac Plaz, and in the public gardens running along the entire length of the Admiralty and offering an unbroken avenue from the Boulevard to the Palace Yard. This used to be bare rough ground, and it is still known by the name of St. Isaac's plain, although some really fine gardens have been already laid out and partially planted.

The space before the palace presented a most striking scene when, after passing by soldiers for a whole hour, I arrived before the palace to find still nothing but soldiers as far as the eye could reach, fifty thousand men and more being that day brought from the barracks and country stations to furnish a military spectacle. There was a leaden wintry sky, and the roofs of the houses across the Neva were white with newly-fallen snow. Sledges you could see moving like insects over the ice. Spires and domes of oriental-looking churches rose above the monotonous lines

Digitized by Google

of palaces. Through the intervals of troops the Exchange and its pillars and steps might be seen in bold outline, and uglier always, the greater the distance between you and them, the monstrous columns, decorated with the prows of quaint ships, stood over the river.

In the Square itself our prospect was of masses of soldiery, out of the centre of whom rose, eighty-four feet in the air, the Alexander Column—a single shaft of beautiful red granite, whose pedestal is ornamented with work smelted from Turkish cannon, and which, as a monument, tells its own history in the inscription "To Alexander the First—grateful Russia." Opposite the main entrance, over which the yellow Imperial flag floated, is the Constantine Arch, its gigantic horses apparently in the act of leaping down from their stucco pedestal amongst the troops below. The public buildings, of which this arch is part, extend nearly a mile. The officers, mounted and on foot, waiting before the Palace gates, were a small army in themselves, and an army of splendid fellows they were. The spectacle of twenty thousand men standing within ken of the palace, like rows of statues, though striking, was not so brilliant as it might have been, or as it would have been had summer reigned instead of winter. These Russian great coats are enormous levellers. The Emperor and his brothers and sons wear them as rough and sombre as the rest of the officers. Decorations, splendid uniforms, and fine figures are thrown away under these closely-buttoned garments. The thing becomes monotonous when the men are numbered by thousands. The privates were alike as two peas, except in the head-gear —tall straight fellows, in long double-breasted brownish grey overcoats, buttoned to the throat. Two broad bands of the same colour crossed the breast, holding in its place the hair-covered knapsack at the soldier's back. The men wore

Digitized by Google

boots reaching above the knee, and the only bit of relief to the sober costume was the monk's hood hanging over the shoulder ready to be lifted for the purposes of warmth. The troops were fully equipped, but the officers appeared in a kind of undress, certainly without much of the war paint one is accustomed to in reviews at home.

It was bitterly cold waiting for an hour in the open air, and I could pity the poor fellows who had been since nine o'clock standing in the snow. The noon-day gun from across the river startled the countless flocks of pigeons which had settled down in good fellowship with the soldiers. Watching these tame birds had been one of the diversions during the hour of waiting, and a Russian officer explained to me that the poorer classes in Russia hold the pigeon in sacred reverence, allowing it to commit havoc and mischief everywhere rather than destroy it, and preferring starvation to a pigeon pie.

Here let me give an instance of the courtesy a foreigner meets with in Russia. From a young man in an English naval officer's uniform, standing like myself in the crowd, of whom I asked a question, I received a supercilious stare and "Don't know." A colonel in the Russian army, who had left his bureau to see the inspection, overhearing the question, observing the snobbishness of the reply, and learning that I was a stranger and an Englishman, attached himself to me until the proceedings were over, gave me information and details of every regiment that passed, and when I returned him with my thanks a hearty "good morning," he lifted his hat and declared the honour and pleasure were all on his side. Why is it one's own countrymen abroad are so disagreeable?

The Emperor did not keep us waiting long after noon. The Grand Dukes had been out and about for an hour riding

Digitized by Google

in rear and front of the regiments. There was a call to "attention" echoed in twenty directions, and a commotion amongst the grooms and horses near the palace entrance. The Emperor was mounting, and with him mounted also the Crown Prince of Germany, in the uniform of one of the Russian regiments. The Emperor is a fine man, but Frederick William in the saddle is a finer, sits his horse more solidly, and has the stamp of service upon him. The bands broke out into brazen and loud welcome of the Emperor, and the soldiers saluted as he rode down the front of the palace to join his other guests and pick up the officers who compose his staff. The British dog that always scampers over the course at Epsom, and takes part in the manœuvres at Wimbledon, is also a Russian institution. Just as the Royal horsemen were abreast of my position a fine grenadier-looking Newfoundlander galloped down the ranks, and was chivied by a gendarme. Some of the bands during the inspection played a bit of Strauss's Blue Danube, in a wild barbaric tom-tom style, that clashed horribly with the English National Anthem, heard in honour of the English princes, in other parts of the Square. The Czar passed far away on his tour of inspection, but we could follow him by the explosive shouts of the regiments as he reached them. Every soldier is bound by order to join in this salute, and the clash of the tom-tom music, the volleys of cheers, and the substratum of "God Save the Queen," mingling together in a kind of salad, made something remarkable in the way of noise. The soldiers, just before the return of the Emperor's cavalcade of some two hundred strong, had been allowed to stand at ease, a privilege which they employed to jump a little warmth into their feet. Seizing their bayonets with both hands they bobbed up and down in very comical fashion. You looked over a solid

Digitized by Google

square of soldiers and suddenly sombre forms would leap a foot up and down with a decidedly Jack-in-the-box effect. In front of every regiment at the march-past rode four or five mounted gendarmes, their horses always being particularly good. First came a regiment of cadets whose march soon became a scramble, and the marine cadets were not a whit superior. Prince Oldenburg's regiment of Imperial Guards was the first real specimen of Russian soldiery which passed. The marching of the Russian soldier —and no better example could be given—is not so free and swingy as either the English or Prussian steps, but it is good, solid, steady tramping, and the dressing is generally all that the most critical officer could wish. It is to-day a work of some difficulty to march the troops off the ground through different outlets, and perhaps it is well that the Emperor should not see the rough-and-tumble manner in which some of the men wheel and form.

The regiments carried a number of small flags affixed to their bayonets for the purpose of marking position on parade, and the gay-coloured little bannerets were some relief to the everlasting brown-grey masses. The second, the Simon regiment, came by at the double, as if glad beyond measure to get back to barracks and rations. The Finlanders ran by the Emperor and his party with a sharp shout. The sharp shouts of course are precisely as numerous as the regiments, and if you were not aware that it is the prescribed formula of invoking a blessing on the Czar, you would take them to mean applause from an admiring public. The Finlanders were fair, strong, bony-faced men, who plunged along like elephants. By this time it snowed hard, and the regiments were white-bearded and powdered.

In the second division there was the famous Moscow regiment, the Emperor Paul's regiment of Guards, wearing

Digitized by Google

the mitre-shaped hats which Paul himself invented. The Rifles followed, a sergeant in the front company being much chaffed by his comrades for losing his képi. The Rifles, if the truth must be told, were out of line, out of order, and behaving in a very unsoldierly fashion. The Rifle Brigade men of his Imperial Majesty were a powerful company, wearing a shako resembling that of the English line regiments. One regiment had turbans. The Sappers passed next, then the Marine Guard, with the Grand Duke Alexis at its head. The colonel of this regiment, I am afraid, was using very profane language to the rear companies, who seemed to be as wooden as the handles of their bright hatchets.

The next was what I can best interpret as a sample regiment, a full regiment composed of specimens of every regiment in the service, but the overcoats brought them all to the same appearance. One regiment of Sappers was made up of the shortest men I had ever seen in uniform, four feet three being the average height. With this, and perhaps one other exception, it must be taken for granted that the men were as fine a set of fellows as any country could produce.

The cavalry was naturally the great object of attention, and worthily so. The Russian cavalry are not famous without cause; and on this occasion the Emperor had given us the flower of his troops. The first regiment was composed of noblemen's sons who had not yet completed their military education. Cuirassiers on bay horses, Cuirassiers on greys and blacks, each man with pennon fluttering and lance fixed, trotted past, an occasional trooper coming to grief, but always making light of it, and recovering his saddle with a smile. The Empress's regiment—fresh from Tsarskoe—was admired by every one, and would be held in the highest estimation did not a chestnut regiment from

Digitized by Google

Gatchina obtain equal praise. There were Grenadiers, Uhlans, (own brothers in appearance to the Prussians of the same ilk), Hussars—the crack regiment in the Russian horse, as many a Russian nobleman has to admit when his son's bills come home—and, lastly, Cossacks of the Don. These wild-looking fellows ride with short stirrups and short rein. Their horses are plump, small, shaggy bays, lively as crickets, and tough as nails. The big Cossack pulled his little head nearly into his breast coat-pocket, and dug his heels far under the animal's belly. They charged furiously, but halted with wonderful precision. In a gallop, one pony sprawled on all fours, and four times in succession he slipped to the ground before recovering his feet; the Cossack, however, never lost his seat, and in the end pulled him up bodily.

Digitized by Google

CHATER XIII.

AUTUMNAL ROVINGS.

IN the Lakes of Killarney and the Giant's Causeway you have the two types of scenery for which Green Erin is famous. The beauty of the former, as the poet and painter have ever loved to tell us, is of the softest and loveliest description; and its praises should be chanted in dulcet tones to the trembling cadence of the Æolian harp. The beauty of the Giant's Causeway is of the rugged order, and its craggy grandeur should be proclaimed by the blusterous north wind through a pipe composed of

"A hundred reeds of decent growth."

The mention of these two places suggests, from quite another point of view, not a contrast so much as a comparison. Some one has either said or sung that happiness in Ireland is always cheap. As is often the case with other statements, the truth of the proposition depends entirely upon circumstances. It is generally considered that there are two sources of enjoyment in this ever-interesting field for the wanderer and sportsman, which are not particularly

Digitized by Google

noted for cheapness—the one is Killarney, the other the Giant's Causeway. The dog who has been unfortunate enough to earn a bad name, is, as the old proverb tells us, as good as gone; and places, too, sometimes suffer from an ill repute they do not deserve. But, as times go, travelling is reasonably economical in and about the romantic lake district of Southern Ireland, and the grand rock-bound coast of the North.

The Giant's Causeway is somewhat out of the beaten track; yet everybody goes there, and whosoever can command leisure should go there. Ireland is, like its neighbour across the narrow Channel, a land of mountain and stream; but there is only one Giant's Causeway. Englishmen, who used to look upon Ireland as a foreign land not to be thought of, have for some years been learning not only to trust themselves in the more familiar districts, but to penetrate into the wildest and most unfrequented portions; and the North of Ireland is now understood to be something more than a huge flat field, and the battle-ground for Orange and Catholic "'Prentice Boys." Increased facilities by land and sea have opened the eyes of the previously blind, and during the past ten years a steady stream of Scotch and American excursionists has flowed through Portrush, and along the interesting high road by which the Giant's Causeway is reached. The fact is, it is no longer the fashion to regard Ireland merely as a convenient landing-stage from which to see Killarney. The western and northern coasts, always the favoured resort of the few, are now well appreciated by the many, and the endless rocks and striking headlands of Donegal, Londonderry, and Antrim, are more than ever sought out by admiring and appreciative holiday-keepers; and if half the English tourists, who "do" the Rhine, knew the surpassingly lovely scenery to be found in almost every

Digitized by Google

part of Ireland, they would probably think twice, and even thrice, before preferring the Continent to the sister kingdom.

As a basaltic formation, the Giant's Causeway is not perhaps so perfect and compact as Fingal's Cave; but it is larger, and its surroundings are finer. Could you, by any secret understanding with the winds, arrange so as to see the Antrim coast in both calm and storm, you would see it to perfection. We have had some very sudden changes of weather lately. Half the country between Portrush and Belfast, especially in the valley of the Bann, is under water, and the rivers, swollen and discoloured, have hastened the exodus of the salmon anglers. It has been a bad week for the Giant's Causeway. If you go to explore all its wonders, you require a calm sea and the wind anywhere but north or north-west. Saturday, for example, was a lovely day. The ocean sparkled calm and blue. Tiny fishing boats, scarce bigger as they vanished in the offing than the white sea-birds circling over your head, ventured far from home, leaving no anxiety behind them. The gentlest of breezes came sighing from the hills and valleys, keeping the entire line of shore, with its manifold wonders, clean and clear for the timidest of visitors.

The dreamy calm was as short lived as it was delusive. In a few hours all was changed. During the night a terrible storm arose, putting out beacon lights on the more exposed headlands, and forcing vessels of large tonnage to run for shelter into the landlocked natural harbours that abound in this region of Loughs. Where all was smiling at sunset, all was uproarious and angry at dawn. Great green rollers from the Atlantic burst fiercely upon the iron-girded shore, racing up the cliffs with a roar of rage, and expending themselves with many a struggle in white foam and spray, showered hundreds of feet into the air. A Scotch steamer, unable to

Digitized by Google

make the harbour of Portrush, tossed uneasily at anchor under the lee of the Skerries.

The long line of rocky islets, which for centuries has stood firm as an advance guard to receive the first shock of the ocean's bombardment, lay quiet one day basking like Brobdingnagian seals in a calm sea; on the next day the mad billows leapt at a bound over them into the gorges and creeks and subterranean waterways and caves, the foam whirling into the interior, and whitening the green downs as if with snow-flakes. To reach the cliffs, from which alone on such a day the choicest portion of Causeway scenery can be commanded, could only be achieved by the hale and hearty; indeed, it could only be done at all by leaning down, as it were upon the gale, until your body represented the steep roof of a house, and you could walk in a position which the human form could never maintain unless breasted by such an unwonted support. Yet but a few hours ago we could enter Dunkerry Cave, seven hundred feet long, on the glassy water-floor.

The Causeway itself, or rather the three Causeways included in the general term, is not the only, nor to some minds the most interesting, feature of the neighbourhood. There is the coast from Dunluce Castle, a rare old romantic pile of ruins, perched on the top of an isolated rock, which must have been as impregnable as the Eagle's Eyrie, far back into the centuries when the McQuillans and the McDonnells of the Isles defied the world from its battlements. The coast from this prominent precipice to Fairhead, some twenty miles eastward, is a succession of caves, crags, and cliffs, far or near, and the scenery is most striking. People, however, naturally begin with the Causeway. As its name suggests, it is a huge projection, long and wide, into the sea. Of course it has a history—what is there in

Digitized by Google

Ireland that has not?—and equally, of course, there is a grotesque resemblance of plausibility in it if you can get over the A B C of giantology and fairydom.

The Ulster peasants are not so superstitious as the peasantry of other provinces, but you could offer them no greater insult than by doubting the authenticity of Fin MacCoul; and the redoubtable Fin is the presiding genius of these parts. What more natural than that the giant being Irish and hearing there was over on the Scottish coast a giant as big and bouncing as himself, should be seized with an unquenchable desire to fight him. We are in our ignorance prone to think international prize fights a modern institution. Observe how we have ignored the little affair of Fin MacCoul, the Irish pet, and Benandonner, the Scotch chicken.

Let us, however, cleave to facts—the undoubted facts of history. The Irish giant, wishing perhaps to make the Scotchman's journey to his own destruction as pleasant as possible, or fearing, maybe, that a sea voyage in the unpretending ships of those days would have taken the gameness out of him, considerately laid down a Causeway from one country to the other. If you doubt the story, how happens it that Staffa possesses the other end of it? As legends go, this is not unreasonable; and, in truth, the Causeway is a great mystery. No doubt most people who have been to school are aware that the Causeway proper is composed entirely of broken columns. In some places they are of various heights, and in two or three instances you will find one column shorter than the rest, and so surrounded by others that the recess resembles a chair. Thus we have the Ladies' Wishing-Chair, and one or two other natural seats, to which stories are of course attached.

There are in the Giant's Causeway level spaces where the

Digitized by Google

peculiarity of the formation is at once seen, and where you walk upon the heads of the columns, forming a grand floor-work of distinct Mosaic. The largest column is about eighteen inches at the greatest width, and whatever shape a pillar may assume its fellows fit closely as wax to it. No wonder incredulous persons refuse to believe it is a curiosity of nature. The guides here use immense words and technical expressions. They talk about pentagons, hexagons, and heptagons, which they point out are the general shapes of the columns. A very few of the pillars are nearly square, one is seven-sided, and there are a good many octagons. The main Causeway is an enormous mass of columns, about forty thousand in number, and each as perfect as if formed and fitted by a skilled workman. Not the least singular feature is that each pillar is composed of joints. There is one pillar, for example, composed of thirty-eight distinct joints, the end of one fragment being convex and the other concave, and each fitting the other with Chinese exactness.

Turning away from the Causeway, the rocks and cliffs, showing here and there fantastic varieties of basaltic pillars, assume new shapes as your boat moves gently along near the shore. Even the rocks have separate names and histories of their own. Pleaskin Head is the furthest headland visited by ordinary tourists, and there is no view on the coast to equal that obtainable from Hamilton's Seat. Below there are rocks, and two wonderful galleries on colonnades of pillars sixty feet high, while the shore stretches away on either hand, always grand in its ruggedness.

To examine the Giant's Causeway and see its surroundings, the latter being frequently omitted, although the one is the supplement to the other, you must follow the line of rocks in a boat, and climb the heights; that done, your time and

Digitized by Google

money will not be thrown away. I believe most or many of the people who visit the Giant's Causeway confess to a little disappointment; they do not find the sensation they had been promised. For this, as usual, they have to thank the extravagant language of guide books and their own confiding faith in it. Then, finding the reality not equal to the warmly-coloured picture, it is perhaps natural that they should fall into the other extreme and become unjust. I met an American gentleman to-day who had spent half an hour at the Causeway, scanning it from a distance, and who was returning to the States convinced that the whole affair was erected by some speculators of a bygone period. It is true the first glimpse of the Giant's Causeway will not take away your breath with amazement, but for all that if you conduct your explorations with diligence and care, even though you may be no geologist and not able to distinguish greenstone from basalt, calcareous spar from quartz, lias from chalk, or trap from ochre, you shall soon admit that wonderful indeed are the works around you.

Do not attempt to argue with the legion of beggars and touts who will beset you. Never lose your temper; they do not intend to devour you piecemeal, although at first you may be pardoned for supposing such to be their diabolical purpose. At Portrush they will swoop down upon you at the railway station, and at the Causeway they will give you no peace. The only method of dealing with these nuisances is to maintain a masterly and good-humoured silence, although, if you can do it adroitly, it is good sport to lead your besieger on to suppose—a mere smile, or the appearance of attention to the fellow will do it—that you will yield, and then having trotted him over a mile of ground, simply ignore him. There would, no doubt, be a little language in the neighbourhood, but the badgered stranger

Digitized by Google

will be in slight measure avenged. About the hotel at the Causeway you are worried by men, boys, and women, to purchase boxes of what they term "specimens of mineral odds and ends," some of which are very ingeniously manufactured.

The guides—boatmen at whose charges everybody grumbles, but who, having a monopoly, are indispensable—are steeped to the lips with giant lore, and they talk as if they believed the pretty stories which they dispense wholesale and retail. You enter a long cave, into which the sea gallops for a hundred yards or more, and in the gloom, surrounded by slime, and with the hollow moan of the waves stealing up the roof, the guide runs off the reel a yarn touching a giant hermit, a meek monster, who took a fancy to pray and fast in a sea-cave, solemnly vowing not to touch food brought by mortal hand. These eccentric suicidal intentions were baffled by a seal, who was evidently cut out for the legal profession. The beast, it is alleged, swam into the cave with food, and the giant, persuaded by a touch of the flipper that the clause as to mortal hands remained inviolate, fell to upon the rations thus providently sealed and delivered, and lived to a green old age.

Half-way up the highest cliff you will see a grand collection of pillars of various lengths, and the name is not inapt—the Giant's Organ. Some distance to the west there stands a figure marvellously resembling a crooked old woman. This is the Giant's granny, who for some dire offence was turned into stone without hope of remedy. The magnificent half-circles of columns, which are the next great sight to Pleaskin, are the Giant's Amphitheatre, where Fin MacCoul would feast a select party of the sons of Anak of that period, grouping them around him on basaltic seats and rocky benches, which remain to this day. The semi-

Digitized by Google

circle is beautifully regular, and the pillars, some eighty and some sixty feet high, stand with all the nicety of mechanical arrangement, not unworthy of association with the Giant's loom, Giant's ball alley, Giant's pulpit, and Giant's bagpipes.

* * * * *

A night's halt at quaint, quiet old Antrim, with its miniature Town Hall, and long, wide, clean main street, will agreeably break the journey from Portrush to Belfast. There is not much on the line of railway to attract attention or excite admiration. Mountains—as they count mountains in Londonderry and in Donegal, where the Highlands are quite worthy of that name—are not as a rule a plentiful article in county Antrim, although to an Englishman who has not qualified as a connoisseur in such matters, there are some eminences that require a considerable amount of climbing, and a few ranges that find a place upon the map even along the track traversed by the Northern Counties Railroad. In the north-western portion of the county there are mountains running to a height of over 1800 feet, but even this altitude is not reached by the hills which run parallel with a portion of the route.

It is not cause, therefore, for poignant regret if the railway windows, as will often happen in this land of perpetual atmospheric weeping, are dimmed and blurred with rain. Get out at Antrim by all means, for thereby hangs a tale—the startling tale told apropos of Shane's Castle, which has more foundation in veritable history than the reputed life and times of our friend Fin MacCoul. A visit to Shane's Castle involves acquaintance with Lough Neagh, the largest lake in the three kingdoms, and therefore entitled to all veneration.

Digitized by Google

You may have your fill of the Lough, visit the ruins, and at night find comfortable quarters at a modest hostelry where a waiter in greasy black, and clouded white necktie was never seen; but where you may take your ease in a solidly comfortable way that smacks of the olden times. The sound of water greets you in Antrim town, and under an ancient bridge rushes the very ideal of a trout and salmon stream. The river is known as Six-Mile Water, so-called apparently because it rises in the hills something between nine and twelve miles from its entrance to Lough Neagh. Alas! through the progress of commerce and manufacture, the Six-Mile Water has been ruined by the mills up stream, and, as a favourite haunt of the finest salmon and trout, its glory has long since departed. Not many weeks ago the fish for miles—such few fish as were left—were borne down from the other manufactories on a current black as tar, and quite as unsavoury, dead and dying. The voracious pike and tempting trout floated in peace together, and as proof, if any were wanted, of the poisonous ingredients which had wrought all the mischief, even the eels, which do not generally stick at a trifle, but prefer a half-decayed corpse to any other seasonable delicacy, passed by limp and lifeless in the mélancholy procession; and yet a worthy youth, in that half Irish, half Scotch tone which you expect in Ulster, tells us that he can remember shovelling the trout out of the still pools by the barrow-load.

On your way to the Lough, which is but a pleasant walk from the town, you pass a well-built mansion, Antrim Castle. The gardens and grounds, laid out in the Louis Quinze style, are reputed the finest in the province, and they must be indeed fine which surpass them. There are thick woods and an abundance of game hereabouts. Here, even within

Digitized by Google

half a mile of the county town, you put up a covey of birds, who will probably be less familiar with mankind in the course of the autumn. An enthusiastic curate is being rowed off in one of the boats as we near the beach of Lough Neagh, making ready his spinning tackle. He might save himself the trouble, for the main river and the other streams that feed this vast sheet of fresh water have been terribly swollen with the recent rains, and the reverend angler must go far from shore before he will get a chance of slaying either pike or trout.

Let us, far wiser in our day and generation, make friends with the fishermen who, in a picturesque group on the grass, are engaged in the occupation which those other fishermen, eighteen hundred years ago, by another inland lake, were pursuing—mending their nets. This will be about the hour when they should be looking after their lines and snares in the Lough, and we must persuade them to bring their fishing ground into our course for Shane's Castle.

A lake resembles a jewel in this—it is all the better for a good setting; and the best settings for a sheet of water are risings woods if it be small, and bold, receding hills if it be of extraordinary dimensions. Nature has kindly recognized this with most of the Scottish lakes, and who cannot remember the wonderful effect which the brawny brow of the neighbouring Ben has upon the loch which is so happy under its protecting shield? Lough Neagh, on the contrary, has every right to complain of its flat uninteresting shore; still it has some counterbalancing things to boast of. It claims affinity to Antrim, Tyrone, Armagh, Londonderry, and Down. It receives several streams, and jealously absorbs them all, allowing but one outlet, the river Bann. It is twenty miles long, and from one point of embarkation a dozen miles broad, with a shore line of some eighty

Digitized by Google

miles in it. Fishermen still make a good living by plying their calling, although, in common with their brethren everywhere, they sadly mourn the hauls of other days.

It is blowing a good deal more than half a gale of wind, and there are waves tumbling over the bar that a victim to *mal de mer* would not probably regard with an excess of favour; but we have a stiff boat, with a keel of twenty-two feet, and a general run reminding you of the fishing cobles of the Yorkshire coast. A couple of large fore and aft sails send us at a spanking rate through the lough, and in the centre we espy, tossing and fretting at the restraint, the buoys marking the whereabouts of nets and lines.

As we shoot through the water the fishermen dispel an illusion. The lough has always been reputed a home of the Gillaroo, the strange, thick, gold-coloured trout found but in few waters, and whose habits are fully described in the book of the Erne, an old but most delightful volume on Irish sporting. The helmsman—who is the patriarch of our crew—says he never caught but one Gillaroo, and his two comrades never saw one perhaps; the supposition is that the race has declined in Lough Neagh. To make amends for the disappointment we are, however, introduced to a finny stranger, a pretty little fish, called the pullan, a fresh-water herring of delicate flavour, but used chiefly here as baits for night-lines. It is not at all out of order to call this genteel fish a fresh-water herring, but he is more compact than that delicious plebeian, and has a dash of the grayling about his silvery overcoat.

It is great fun pulling in the eel lines, each of which is taut, and troubled with a wriggling captive. In they come, one after another, protesting until the last line is drawn, and there is very little short of half a hundredweight of such game in the basket. A big pike or salmon has broken out

Digitized by Google

of one of the nets, but the other imprisons in its meshes two brace and a half of nice trout, that cut pink and firm as a salmon, when dexterously tickled at table, by-and-by, with an antique silver fish slice.

Shane's Castle looks very spectral as we up sail and run at express speed for its projecting grounds. The sun sinking rapidly over the western shore of the lough, warms the hoary brown of the ruins, and bathes the splendid wood behind, while the shadows seem to add a few extra turrets to the pile. If you have ever seen a yacht belonging to the Ulster Club (whose head-quarters are in Belfast Lough) you may have noticed that the burgee displayed a bloody hand. A sinister hand, gules, is the armorial ensign of the province, and it was a Shane's Castle chieftain who figured in the story which suggested the emblem. The chief of an invading expedition, so the story runs, approaching the shores of Ireland, said that the follower who first touched the coveted territory should possess it. One man outwitted his fellows by chopping off his hand and hurling it on shore before the foremost boat could touch land. This was the founder of the great Ulster chieftains, the O'Neills of the Red Hand. The member of the family after whom the castle was named, Shane O'Neill, was a name known at the English Court. He of the red hand lorded it over the other chiefs, and in Queen Elizabeth's time the reigning chieftain O'Neill was virtually king of Ulster. This was Shane O'Neill, who, with a body-guard of 600 soldiers, and an army of 5000 horse and foot, had many a brush with the English troops, made a journey with the armed retinue of an independent prince to London, and treated personally with the British maiden Queen.

The days of Red Hands are gone; the O'Neills no longer summon body-guards of long, curled gallow glasses,

Digitized by Google

armed with battle-axes, and attired in yellow vest, short tunics, and shaggy cloaks, to burn, kill, and destroy. Shane's successor, Lord O'Neill, dwells undisturbed on his estate, and courteously allows the stranger to wander through the demesne, inspect the interesting ruins, and capture the speckled trout in the river, overhung with umbrageous branches. Red Hand, forsooth! The Rifle Club have just broken up their encampment.

Before re-entering our boat we are shown the remnants of a carved head, whose fall, it is said, will be simultaneous with the end of the ancient race. The Banshee of Shane's Castle we did not hear, although its shriek, denoting impending evil to an O'Neill, is, they say, sometimes to be heard among the woods, upon the shore, along the ruined walls of the falling castle, echoed by the vaults underneath, and wailing through the nettle-covered graves of the departed.

There are some geological valuables associated with Lough Neagh—pebbles of chalcedony, cornelian, opal, or quartz, a couple of little islands, and a reputed quality in the water of petrifying wood. And in the poem in which Tom Moore calls upon Erin to remember the days of old, and refers to the Knights of the Red Branch, an hereditary order of chivalry known in Ulster before the birth of Christ, he embodies the pretty legend of Lough Neagh—

> "On Lough Neagh's bank as the fisherman strays
> When the clear cold eve's declining,
> He sees the round towers of other days
> In the wave beneath him shining!"

Ireland is worth living in, if only because of the cheapness of its horse hire. But for this we might have felt constrained to deny ourselves a seat outside a jaunting car

Digitized by Google

along the road between Antrim and Belfast, for it is a spell of seventeen mild Irish miles, of which humorous, pleasant Sam Lover sang—

> "The miles in this country much longer be;
> But that is a saving of time you see,
> For two of our miles is aiqual to three,
> Which shortens the road in a great degree."

The journey affords a most interesting study of the agricultural aspect of a country which, in this respect, may be taken to represent the thrift and prosperity of the province. The producing capabilities of the land are not of the best, but the careful cultivation and the neat farmsteads show the kind of stuff of which the people are made.

To an observer, who has seen the slovenly farming and miserable dwellings of the West, this drive will present a contrast little short of amazing; instead of tumble-down walls, broken fences, ill-divided and undrained land, roofs that would be black with dilapidated thatch if they were not covered with vagrant weeds and strong stalks of grain, peasants' mud-wall cottages in which pigs, fowls, and children eat out of the same three-legged iron pot, we have substantial stone tenements, in perfect repair, gleaming with clean whitewash, flanked by comfortable gardens, and tastefully brightened by a few flowers, while along the entire route the hedges are well set and well kept. The gates cannot be kicked down by the first passing calf, and to the crest of the highest ridge industrious hands have subdued the natural unfriendliness of the soil, and made the most of it. There is not a better high road in England, and there are few so broad, and in such sensible order as this. A turnpike road you cannot term it, for there is not a tollbar from beginning to end. The labouring people are not bare

Digitized by Google

legged or ragged, and, in truth, there are some English counties where Hodge had better hide from comparison with the Antrim farm hand. There seems this year to have been great delay with the hay crop, and it is high time the cocks which still stand in the meadows should be ricked. The grain is not ripe, nor are the crops good even for this land; but such potato fields were never seen before.

Some one has informed the independent, civil, well-dressed driver of my car that when there is a comet grapes and potatoes are to be had galore, and this certainly happens at present to coincide with known facts. Somehow the potato in Ireland makes a much grander show in the field than elsewhere. The leaves are greener and more gracefully cut, the stalks are more bushy, and the flowers better shaped and coloured. One would not care to mention an Irish potato field as the subject of an epic or an Academy picture, but an Englishman cannot fail to be struck with the luxurious picture it presents.

Happily the flax at this time of the month rests at a stage when the nostrils are not seriously offended by it. It covers the field just now, like straight short lengths of hay, and is undergoing the process of drying as rapidly as the moist climate will allow it. The English characteristics of the landscape are continued by the appearances of Episcopalian, Presbyterian, and other places of worship in the villages. A range of hills, along the base of which we wind, extends to the left; the commons of Carrick are very picturesque, and in a high state of cultivation. For what is called scenery the country, however, is not remarkable; nature has done nothing violently here, but has been content with gentle undulations and a fair proportion of wood and water. The rain-stained placards on the walls remain to show that, whatever a recent election cry in other parts may have been,

Digitized by Google

Tenant-right was the all-absorbing watchword in Antrim, and looking round once more upon the fair scene, we are reminded of what Ulster tenant-right has done, and may jog onward, musing whether without it the hand of the diligent would have wrung out of the soil the flax, oats, and potatoes which it now yields.

The face of the country suggests plenty. But for the news we had heard of troops moved and policemen drafted in readiness for the "fifteenth," and the possible conflicts between Catholics and Protestants—but for the appearance by-and-by at the brow of a hill of a little regiment of constables with rifles over their shoulders and bayonets in their sheaths, one might have written peace as well as plenty, and the word happily could yet be written, for the fifteenth came and departed, and the peace was not broken.

At length we have reached the highest point of the road, and Belfast Lough, lovely as heart could desire, lies beneath, five miles distant, it is true, but stretching seaward—a view decked with the brightest of crystal and purest of green. The houses of Bangor and Holywood on the opposite coast sparkle in a treacherous burst of sunshine, ships of every tonnage lie motionless in the ample natural harbour, the steamers cross and recross, the ruins of Carrickfergus Castle far up the western shore are conspicuous; but it is evident that beyond, where Ailsa Craig should be visible, there are rain and storm.

Belfast, into whose suburbs we are descending, demands more than a bird's-eye view. The absolute stranger will be surprised at its vigour, position, and importance. The fleet of full-rigged ships, the tier of large steamers in the docks, the imposing buildings, the prosperity which is apparent in the broad busy thoroughfares, tell their own tale of work in the past, and a promised reward in the future.

* * * * * *

Digitized by Google

How many schoolboys, I wonder, could, on the spur of the moment, describe the whereabouts of the North Channel? To a very learned professor yesterday, it had to be explained that it has nothing to do with Arctic exploration or the mysteries of the North-West Passage, that it is not even a far-away corner of the German Ocean, but that it is simply the narrow strait which graciously offers to passengers affrighted at the thought of sea sickness the shortest possible voyage from Ireland to England. It yields many obvious advantages to persons compelled to hurry from this section of the Sister Isle, and who at the uttermost can only steal two or three days for dawdling on the march back to home and duty. The sea voyage is a mere bagatelle of three hours; in itself the passage is most interesting; it is new to the majority of Englishmen; and then, as a final argument, and having that dawdling project in view, it brings under your notice the southern coast of Scotland, with its numerous though little-talked-of beauties.

By this time I have pitched my tent at the clean little town of Newton-Stewart, which flourishes on the western boundary of the stewartry of Kirkcudbright. The river Cree, tumbling over a broad weir on its descent to Wigton Bay, makes melody so soothing that I half suspect it of having conspired with the boulders, around which the current whitens into foam, to prevent me from recalling the principal features of the journey hitherwards—a bit of national jealousy which cannot, however, for a moment detract from, or prevent me from recurring to, the delightful parting views of the Irish coast.

The train to Larne follows the coast of Belfast Lough so close that you might, if the fancy seized you, shell old Carrickfergus Castle with a pea-shooter; so close that you can see the movement of the sea fowls' eyes on the foreshore,

Digitized by Google

and hear their shrill piping and screaming; so close that the opposite coast appears to pass before you like a moving diorama of exquisite scenery. Then, winding round the base of a wood-crowned hill, it runs along the margin of the smaller but not less charming Lough Larne, and lands you close to the pier where the comely scarlet-funnelled steamer snorts impatiently to be released from her moorings. A few revolutions of the paddles and we are in the blue water of the North Channel, heading straight across the narrow waters.

Nothing would induce me to be unfaithful to Dublin Bay, than which there is no more glorious prospect to the incoming or departing visitor, save, perhaps, the Cove of Cork, which is so superlatively lovely as to warrant exclusion from an every-day catalogue. But the North Channel, to be prosaic, has two strings to its bow; you have scarcely done with Ireland before you have to deal with Scotland, showing that nothing is easier and more agreeable than to be off and on with the old and new loves at discretion. South of Larne is a low craggy headland; beyond and above are fields, hedged in from the distance like so many pocket-handkerchiefs of assorted patterns and colours, and ranging from the water's edge to the high sky line; mountains, dark and rolling northwards, darken the background, and as the good ship speeds from shore it is a study, indeed, to watch their solid heads change from blue to grey, and from grey to to impalpable cloud.

The Maidens, solitary at their posts far from shore, gleam white as nuns in the evening shadows. Be thankful that they are not sirens to lure the hapless mariner to his destruction, but conspicuous beacons warning him of hidden dangers. Away northwards looms very conspicuously a long tongue of land, low-lying at first, but gradually rising to

Digitized by Google

to a goodly altitude, and then suddenly sloping down into the sea. This is the famous Mull of Cantyre that, running a clear forty miles away from the mainland, might by running only thirteen miles farther have formed a bridge between Antrim and Argyllshire.

Midway in the Channel we are on the highway of the Scotch and American packets, and there is coming up at full speed a stately vessel that to-morrow will be taking on board her last passengers at Londonderry, and then, heigh-ho! for the broad Atlantic. Like a huge dome thrust out of the sea at a venture stands Ailsa Crag, clearly visible to us though six miles distant. This rocky island is a striking feature from both sea and land, and must be reverenced, if for nothing else, because it has given a name to a peer of the realm.

Loch Ryan, which during the last five minutes has exchanged its soothing music for a decidedly brawling tone, may now conspire no more. Ireland by this time is blotted out of sight. And how better could I conciliate this Scottish stream, whose clannishness is so worthy of itself, than by pointing to the hilly coast which stretches yonder into northerly dimness? We were not so ignorant, maybe, we smokers on the bridge, as not to know that yonder was the land of Burns. Even the river Cree will admit that he sang as sweet a song as any of its own splashing brooks or murmurous falls. The banks and braes of bonnie Doon were not very far from us as the crow flies, and we could scan it, at any rate by the eye of faith, with some degree of certainty too, for we had an American lady in the saloon, whose bulky European guide-book was stuffed with flowers and ferns culled from the scenes trodden by the Ayrshire Ploughman, and who held her pilgrimage to the cottage, monument, and "Alloway's auld haunted Kirk," as of the

Digitized by Google

first importance. But with every desire to converse of the bard whom we all loved, the thing was not easy while the steamer was racing into Loch Ryan at something like thirteen knots an hour, and fresh landscapes were opening out, bringing fresh suggestions, and fresh topics of conversation.

So Burns and all the romantic associations of his name passed from the mind, while a north country professor, to whom the severest mathematics are pastime, and who smokes the strongest tobacco ever blackened into twist, walked aft, the black ribbons of his bonnet fluttering, and his deep bass voice undertoning something which sounded remarkably like Auld Lang Syne. The narrow green-lined loch was a delightful termination of the North Channel passage, and you may begin your dawdling as soon as you choose after touching ground at Stranraer. I believe there yet remain people who can find subject for admiration in other than the modern rule-of-thumb riband system of gardening, and to such might be mentioned the ruins of Castle Kennedy, near Stranraer, where the magnificent grounds are kept in the good old-fashioned style of landscape gardening, and where it is shown that the true business of art—in gardening—is to serve and not stamp out nature.

In a mountainous country if you have a choice in the matter, always halt near the mouth of a river; and if a salmon river all the better. As a rule, it may be taken for granted that you are then in a position to command the pick of the neighbouring scenery. Up the stream will be whatever there are of glens, and burns, and moorland. A little thought upon the character and predilections of the salmon might almost excuse you for passing your plate for a second slice of the curded delicacy. He leaps and fights his way through

Digitized by Google

life like a hero, and is, by the same token, a capital guide-book of the country which he honours by ascending.

Of Newton-Stewart, till within a day or two, I am ashamed to confess the most benighted ignorance; but it was enough for me to hear that the Cree was a salmon river. The result has verified my long-established conviction of the worth of the fish as a direction-post for the sight-seer. Here at Newton we are on the confines of Ancient Galloway, and the modern province of that name includes the counties of Kirkcudbright and Wigtonshire. The river Cree, indeed, which I am doing my best to conciliate, is the western, as the Nith is the eastern, boundary of the Stewartry of Kirkcudbright. There is a popular drive on the left bank of this stream to Glen Trool, which bountifully repays a halt here, since it combines a variety of all that should enter into the composition of fine scenery. Take it as a sample of other "outings" at hand. The historical thirst from which tourists are supposed to suffer may be within half an hour dissipated by a draught from the ivy-covered ruins of Castle Stewart. Distance in the shape of hills, and mountain-tops purpled by heather, lend a necessary enchantment to the view; the loch into which the Cree widens adds the salient water feature; and for three miles at a stretch the famous woods of Cree are reflected in the river. Moorlands put in an appearance to complete the proportions, and northward and westward mountains arrest the clouds at one moment, and at the next shake them off to look the god of day boldly in the face.

At the spot where the road crosses an arm of the Cree, the prospect seems alive with silvery streamlets hurrying and winding in their everlasting course through picturesque banks to the coast. There are romantic stories of Bruce, and bloody remembrances of the troopers who hunted down the

Digitized by Google

Covenanters, to be told of the neighbourhood; but the all-powerful pictures spread out upon this wide, wonderful canvas of land and water absorb all attention. At Glen Trool, containing a snug shooting lodge, under a range of rocky hills, you ascend an eminence to overlook the gem of the collection—Loch Trool, studded with islets, and over-awed by a burly mountain standing stern guard afar off, with other mountains around to keep it company, though less grimly, in its steadfast task.

The Linns, a majestic waterfall, thunders through a neighbouring gorge into the loch. Across the hills is Loch Dee, from which the superannuated gamekeeper, acting as guide, declared to us that a Liverpool gentleman last year bore away six dozen of prime trout—a statement open to doubt, for the worthy man admitted upon cross-examination that there were both pike and perch in plenty in the loch; and in that case the trout, though perhaps large, could not be numerous. But there are some fish for the angler in all the lochs and streams. I was, for example, shown a pool, not three miles from Newton, in which a lad a few days since slew an eighteen-pound salmon. This, it is true, was in preserved water; but Lord Galloway's agent is liberal in permission to fish waters equally good.

* * * * * *

The journey from the river Cree to the river Nith, the next stage on our way to the English border, is across the widest part of the Stewartry of Kirkcudbright. The country traversed is surpassingly beautiful. There are occasions when we sigh for the old coaching days, and for a land in which the shriek of the locomotive is never heard, but in this lovely part of the Stewartry we have every reason to be grateful to the railway, since without it one of the most interesting portions of the district would be unopened.

Digitized by Google

It is Lowland only by courtesy. For miles the mountains heave northward in a billowy formation that resembles the most striking Dartmoor scenery, only the billows are more gigantic, and there is an absence of the granitic masses which speckle the desolate Devonshire moorland. At one station the line crosses a deep valley over a tall, handsome viaduct, and, far beneath, the passenger from his window sees the mountain stream madly chasing itself from rock to rock, turning, twisting, bubbling, contracting, spreading, and sparkling along a sandy margin, unrelieved by bush or shrub, and in its every feature suggestive of still bleaker and wilder country far up in its cradle land. The journey is not long enough to be monotonous, but of sufficient duration to familiarize you with the bold grandeur of this description of landscape. The well-rounded mountains are now developing the mellow hues of autumn, save where the heather assumes a startlingly deep purple by contrast with the golden brown or the mossy herbage. The cattle for which this famous Galloway land is noted are upon all the hills, and black-faced mountain sheep, nimble as goats, leap from knoll to knoll, in their haste to escape upwards from the approaching locomotive.

Railway travelling, after all, is not absolute misery, although it is somewhat the fashion to say so. In the latter half of our journey a thunderstorm broke; forked lightning cleft the sky, and seemed to pierce the summits of the hills like daggers aimed with a deadly hand; a hailstorm followed, and then, with marvellous rapidity, the atmosphere cleared, the sun recoloured the mountains, and the sweet bow of promise was placed in the clouds. All this appeared as a succession of set scenes, of which the carriage-window was the framework. In similar fashion the mountains seemed to parade before us like regiments on a review

Digitized by Google

ground, presenting every variety of shape, and colour, and distance. By-and-by the hills gave place to the softer surroundings of Lochs Kerr and Dee, and to the woods, gardens, and habitations of the well-cultivated pasture lands intervening between the lakes and Castle Douglas.

Castle Douglas is another such halting-place as Newton-Stewart, being the centre of many interesting places recommended to tourists. Here, as at Newton, in the middle of the community, there is a solidly-built town-house, with its tower and clock; but the ancient meeting-place for bailies, provosts, and councillors has been turned into a billiard-room, while a new and more fashionable building has been provided as a home for the fathers of the burgh. In the pre-railway era Kirkcudbright (pronounced Kurcoobrĭ) was an out-of-the-world town, sleeping placidly to the lullaby of its own bay; but it will scarcely do to accuse it of somnolence now that a pert little branch line has brought it within reach of the main road between Dumfries and Stranraer.

A rare old royal burgh is Kirkcudbright, thriving, too, in these days, with its handsome new bridge and bustling harbour. Here again, in the heart of the town, do we find the old court-house, surmounted by a quaint tower and spire and clock, and from "turret to foundation stone" of evident antiquity. The river Dee affords many picturesque views and walks, and there is a particularly fine prospect from the west end of the bridge. The castle ruins by the river's brink stand isolated from all modern whims and contrivances. The crumbling walls, reared three hundred years since on the site of a Franciscan Priory, have for generations clothed themselves in a living mantle of ivy of the most luxuriant foliage.

Dundrennan Abbey, nearer the shore of Solway Firth,

Digitized by Google

is reputed to be one of the finest specimens of Gothic architecture in Scotland. It stands in a nook which is fit shrine for such a genuine relic of the past. It overlooks the sea, and, southward, gives glimpses of the Cumberland mountains, but otherwise it is hemmed in by hills; and the trout stream, which you may always expect near an abbey or monastery, is near at hand. The patriarchal arches and columns, some of which are in excellent preservation, are covered with lichen as aged apparently as the stones it conceals. The sentimental visitor may sit down in one of the silent, mouldy recesses of the ruins, and indulge his fancy to the full, for it was at Dundrennan Abbey that Mary Queen of Scots spent her last night in Scotland.

On the homeward road is the Auchencairn estate, with a coast abounding in creeks, caves, rocks, and smugglers' traditions. Sir Walter Scott, who was very fond of the Solway Firth scenery, and who used it with photographic effect, is supposed to have laid the most stirring incidents of "Guy Mannering" in or about Auchencairn Bay. Captain Dirk Hatteraick and his smugglers might certainly have hidden in many of the fastnesses on this small peninsula, and have ample room to spare for the accommodation of a few waifs and strays from their lawless brethren on the other side of the Firth.

The Nith, charged with the recent scourings of the far distant Lanarkshire and Ayrshire mountains, has a gloomy and turbulent greeting for the wayfarer. The sunshiny weather which had gladdened us, seemed to have broken, and Dumfries, by the time we enter its streets, lies under a brooding sky. The river tumbles hoarsely over the weir opposite the broad timber quay, and the men and boys on the opposite bank, seeing the colour deepen every moment, put up their rods and lines, and depart with dejected

Digitized by Google

countenances. In the morning the stream had presented the hue of London porter; in the evening it has thickened into the consistency of pea-soup. But in storm or calm Dumfries cannot be robbed of its great natural advantages—of its delightful environs, which rise like ramparts bristling not with weapons of war, but with a *chevaux de frise* of coppice and plantation, and bright villas set in verdant grounds—of its Vale of Nith, or of its second line, so to speak, of defence, the higher mountains that stand respectfully back, as if reluctant to lord it too obtrusively over the vale.

Adown this vale Burns said he wandered to mark the sweet flowers of the spring, and to muse and sing of Phillis. If one might speak from passing experience, the more modern youth of Dumfries have also discovered the aptitude of the Valley of the Nith for musing and talking with Phillis. The grand avenue of trees and level stretch of sward are scarcely worth the name of park, but still it is not the less agreeable as a promenade because of the misnomer, and there are few towns in the United Kingdom that can give its inhabitants such a stroll as that waterside walk past the docks. Dumfries is venerable, and in the surrounding neighbourhood supplies abbeys on quite a wholesale principle.

But before you can bestow undivided time and thought upon historical or archæological matters, Robert Burns must be remembered. Not, however, that you are likely to forget the poet in Dumfries, which is for ever sacred to his memory. There is a street named after him, and there, glistening in the shower, hangs a very fair portrait of him on a signboard. You are shown the house in which he died, the conspicuous tomb which contains his dust, the rooms in which he lived, the tavern where he was served by Anna of the Golden Locks, the chair in which he sat, the window-

Digitized by Google

panes he scribbled upon, and the octavo copy of "De Lolme on the British Constitution," in which he wrote, "Mr. Burns presents this book to the library, and begs they will take it as a creed of British liberty until they find a better—R. B."

The poet, doubtful of the manner in which the sentiment would be received, afterwards pasted the fly-leaf back upon the next page. But the tale of Burns's life in Dumfries has been oft told. We know how he stamped leather, gauged malt-vats, noted the manufacture of candles, granted spirit licences, took his morning and afternoon walk along Dock Green, received his six o'clock tea from Bonnie Jean, discussed the news with his friends at the Globe, was respected and admired by the public, and beloved by his friends, and died on the 21st July, 1797, in that small upper chamber in Bank Street.

The old bridge which divides Galloway from Dumfries is justly regarded with pride by the burghers. It is one of their witnesses in chief, proving their title to a place in the history of six centuries ago. Moreover, it is in itself a romance of blood and feud, or, rather, would be so could it tell of the deeds it witnessed in the blustering days of the past; and, in its elevated position, it is a happy ornament alike to the river and the town.

It is impossible to narrate in their order, and with the detail they deserve, the many attractions which the Scottish Queen of the South loves to display. Space fails us to write of Carlaverock Castle, the Ellengowan of "Guy Mannering;" of the monument to "Old Mortality" (Robert Patterson); of the resting place of Helen Walker, the original of Jeanie Deans; of the much-frequented walk along the Nith to the ruins of the Lincluden Abbey; of Sweetheart Abbey, built in mediæval times by Dame Baliol

Digitized by Google

to receive the heart of her husband, which she embalmed in an ivory casket, and kept beside her until the abbey should be ready to enshrine it, and where the true wife was afterwards laid with the precious memento upon her breast; of the striking view of mountain and sea caught from the crest of Whinnyhill; of the room in Dumfries known as Prince Charlie's, in remembrance of a visit that unfortunate gentleman paid to the town, which he looted to a heavy tune; or of the works and ways of modern Dumfries.

At the railway station, the only station probably in the country planted in the midst of a blooming nursery garden, the train is waiting to bear us by Gretna Green across the Border to Carlisle, and thence by midnight express through Cumberland to the South.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XIV.

CHRISTMAS EVE IN A PUNT.

SOME people are never satisfied. It would be too tedious, too laborious a task to enter into the why and wherefore of this latent discontent in human nature, nor does the subject befit a festive season of the year.

It would not be altogether correct to say that Harvey Kype, of Kype Manor, Esquire, was never satisfied; but it is no libel to whisper that his fits of satisfaction were of the description of angels' visits—few and far between. He was especially displeased with his son and heir, Harvey junior. I am informed that in these days of juvenile precocity, when boys tell each other that "the governor is a jolly old chap," and girls vote parental lectures "awfully slow," it is no uncommon thing to find the head of the household in opposition to the young hopeful who will some day sit on the domestic treasury bench. But Harvey Kype, of Kype Manor, had really very little cause for dissatisfaction.

Harvey junior was quite a model boy. He never told a lie, nor tried his hatchet on the favourite pear tree; he was

Digitized by Google

innocent of tale-bearing and other amusements of the genus sneak, and he was a most lovable brother and son. But he seemed to have been born with a love for natural history. In the eyes of the pater that was a high crime and misdemeanour, for the old man, a month before the lad was born, had decided that, if he proved to be a boy, he should be a clergyman, a canon, a dean, and a bishop. But Harvey junior cared for none of these things : gun and fishing rod, butterfly net and botanist's box, were the things which he promised from the earliest days to make the articles of his life's creed; and Harvey Kype, of Kype Manor, Esquire, therefore lived and died a dissatisfied man.

Harvey junior, nevertheless, contrived to make a good many excellent friends. J. B. Thornbury, B.A., was one of them, and the very merriest Christmases of his life were spent at Kype Manor, over which Harvey junior in due time became titular lord. The young squire was a sterling fellow; even his father could not deny that. His master at Harrow would account for the pupil's backwardness by deploring his inordinate love for out-of-door studies, but would take the edge off the complaint by admiration of the lad's noble nature. His Cambridge tutors knew that the youth who was scouring the fens when he ought to have been poring over his books would never be a bright light of the University; but they would say there wasn't a fellow in his college with less vice. Yes, he was a sterling Englishman; and, after all, he was rich enough to survive any little scholastic shortcomings.

You grip a man's hand all the heartier after indulging in some such mental preface as the foregoing. So gripped Thornbury, B.A., on that memorable Christmas visit, to which the reader is being gradually led up. Let his delight at finding the train not more than two hours late; at spying

Digitized by Google

his friend and his dog-cart outside of the station; at being, after flying over ten miles of road in three-quarters of an hour, welcomed at Kype Manor—I say, let these be taken as matters of course. There he was, in the warmth and light, and there he meant to stay. The snow seemed to come down expressly to welcome him: it had been expected for days, but not a flake appeared until the dogcart turned into the avenue of elms by which the house is approached. The most sentimental of Harvey's daughters plucked a very sweet sonnet out of the circumstance, hailing the snow as at once a welcome guest and a welcoming host.

"Quite an old-fashioned winter," said Harvey next morning as the friends stood together at the French window of the breakfast-room, looking out in that dreamy manner that people somehow always put on when the landscape has been newly whitened.

"Yes," Thornbury answered, "everybody seems to have discovered that this morning; but we have not had much downfall yet, and I see the thermometer only marks forty degrees in the hall."

"All in good time," continued the host. "To-morrow morning we shall be below freezing point, and hard weather is a dead certainty; I told you so," he added, turning to his gentle wife.

"Yes," Mrs. Kype said, "Harvey is a very good weather prophet. He declares that the movements of the birds during the late autumn are as good as any barometers, terrometers, or meteorological departments. He certainly has, from Michaelmas to the present time, foretold a hard winter."

"That's a nuisance then," said Thornbury, "for there's an end of *my* sport."

"Ah," replied his friend, "I had forgotten that you are

Digitized by Google

fonder of the rod than the gun. We must take our chance when we can get it. Put Rory into the cart, Tom, and get a few baits. We must try Turnhill Broad before it gets frozen over."

Naturally, this was not a satisfactory scheme for the young folks, who were reckoning upon help in those delightful preparations that give Christmas Eve so much of its charm. But neither Harvey nor Thornbury, B.A., cared a great deal for church decorations, nor, indeed, for the long-legged, long-skirted curate, who had appointed himself commander-in-chief of the bevy of fresh-coloured girls. They made the best of it, quoted necessity (about the broadest-shouldered victim for excuse-hunters the world ever knew), and promised to return very early.

"Do please come back before dark," Mrs. Kype entreated; "remember it's Christmas Eve, and we never fail in yule-log worship."

"And we have three of your favourite songs which must be sung to-night," said Alice the fair.

"And you owe me a game of chess," said Lina the gipsy-eyed.

"Yes, Uncle Thornbury (the children had years before appointed him "uncle"), and you promised to give me twenty out of a hundred," said Tracy Kype, who actually had a taste and was destined for the church, and who would perhaps have satisfied even the grandfather, had that worthy not been a long resident of the family vault.

"As sweet a Christmas Eve programme as heart could wish; trust me not to fail," concluded Thornbury, in lightness of heart.

"I'll just bring my gun," said Harvey, coming out of the house with a workmanlike breech-loader in his hand; "you never know what may turn up at these times, and there's a

Digitized by Google

bird I've been looking for these three weeks. Ah! (glancing down at the cob's feet) they've frosted old Rory, but there's no need of that. There's only an inch of snow, and it looks a trifle clearer just now. Shouldn't be at all surprised if you get a good basket of pike to-day."

"So mote it be," was the response. Thornbury, B.A., had been so forced to the mill-round of town duties that since the close of the trout season he had never handled a rod; therefore was he at this moment very blood-thirsty in his intentions towards the ferocious denizens of the well-stocked expanses of water towards which they were driving. His friend was a better judge than he, and evidently thought little of the severity of the weather, but it seemed to him to be bitterly cold—that hard steely sort of cold against which there is no appeal. However, it would not be a long drive; they had rugs, wrappers, and Ulsters, and there is no better exertion in the world than the wielding of a supple spinning rod. Rory trotted without a slip over the ground, and soon brought the adventurers to Harvey's boat-house.

Said Thornbury, "You may talk of the joy-inspiring features of spring, laud the more matronly charms of summer, and paint and sing the beauties of mellow autumn; but, so long as it be thorough, give me a winter scene."

Here before the sportsmen lay an immense lake of oval shape, its waters, in the pure white setting of the snow-covered earth, dark almost to blackness. Beyond the further shore were seen the blue straight-rising smoke of a hamlet, the pointed spire of the church that to-morrow would ring a merry Christmas chime, the peeping chimneys of the cottages, and the long outstretched motionless arms of the windmills on the higher ground. The bared limbs of the larger trees were powdered lightly on the upper portions of the branches; the smaller boughs and the hedges were

Digitized by Google

like fine coral; the sere amber leaves of the oaks were plainly visible in the clear atmosphere. Nor cattle, nor herdsmen, nor horses, nor flocks were to be seen; birds in columns, and lines, and masses, regular and irregular, were manœuvring over the water and uplands. The tall sedges and bullrushes, dry and yellow and ghostly, around the margin of the lake, rustled and rattled as the wind shivered fitfully through them.

"How picturesque it all looks in the spotless veil which conceals what is unlovely!" Thornbury ejaculated. "How ethereal the smoke hovering over the snug hamlet; how fair the country in its silent repose!

> "The cormorant on high
> Wheels from the deep, and screams along the land.
> Loud shrieks the soaring hern; and with wild wing
> The circling sea-fowl cleaves the flaky clouds."

"When you've made an end of your ecstacy, Thornbury," broke in his companion, "we had better push off. The days are short now."

That was the only fault to be found with Harvey; he had no soul for poetry. But he was right. They pushed off, selecting a small half boat and half punt. Harvey said it would keep him warm to row about while Thornbury cast right and left; so the lad who had met them at the boat-house took the cart to the farm where Rory usually found stabling, and was directed to return at four o'clock. There was quite a collection of punts in the boat-house; long narrow craft decked with canvas, variations of the old Poole punt, boats with sails, boats with oars, boats with broad paddles and setting poles; boats with oars muffled, oars tied, and oars loose; boats, in short, for the serious business of wild-fowl shooting in all its branches, and boats for the

Digitized by Google

lighter demands of pleasure and half-hearted sporting. The little punt in which the friends put off was of the latter category—a snug, round-bottomed, snub-nosed affair, just fit for the work in hand.

It was cold to be sure, but when they were fairly at work —one with the oars, the other with the rod—a healthy glow shone on their faces. Although a little snow had fallen in the water, there had not been sufficient to constitute the mixture the angler dreads as snow broth; certainly not enough to put the jack off the feed. There fell to Thornbury's lot on that twenty-fourth of December on Turnhill broad as lively a bit of sport as often falls to one man in one day. Spinning with small rudd—the store-box having run out of roach and dace—he tickled the serrated jaws of many a prowling *luce*. None of the fish captured were very weighty, but the numbers told well. The mighty patriarchs of the deep somehow kept quiet; so did the very small jack, but the five, six, and seven pound gentlemen appeared to snap at anything and everything. They were taken far out, and close to the boat; in some instances the long dark form would follow the spinning bait like a gliding shadow to within six inches of the boat, then there would be a bang, bang, and a swirl of the tail on the surface as the fish turned to go off with three or four flights of triangles in his jaw for Christmas fare. Two fish actually leaped out of the water in pursuit of the bait.

Harvey enjoyed the success as much as the angler did—true mark of the sportsman. Yet, as has been observed in the prologue of this little story, some people are never satisfied. The bottom of the boat was, before very long, covered with the brightly-mottled, olive-hued slain; nevertheless, Thornbury would not be comforted until that monster which every fisherman carries in his tackle-case, in

Digitized by Google

the same way as the French soldier carries the field-marshal's baton in his knapsack, had come to hand. His good friend by-and-by pulled him into the middle of the broad.

"The big ones are in the deeps at this time of the year," he pronounced. "They never get near the reeds if they can help it after November or thereabouts."

He had him, by Jove! at last. The style of the fish's striking fairly took away the fisherman's breath. It was not the waggle, waggle, whack sort of strike, but one strong, swooping pounce, succeeded by a rush which none but a fool would attempt to check. I here repeat that Harvey was a true sportsman. In this supreme moment he was silent. A common man would have bawled—

"Be careful, Thornbury, my dear boy," or "Gad, you'll lose him if you don't look sharp," and so forth.

Harvey simply rested on his oars and watched for emergencies, backing after the fish when it was apparent that he meant to fight for his life, having perhaps previously marked a few small water-fowl or a favourite brother for his Christmas dinner. Seen from the shore it must have been an edifying tableau—the intrepid angler standing in the boat, his rod bent in a graceful curve towards the water, and the oarsman cleverly following in the direction of the runaway fish. They were the sole occupants of the middle distance of that wintry picture.

The description shall not be prolonged. Say, for short, that that Christmas Eve pike gave the pair twenty minutes' play; say half an hour or more, if you will. The important point, so far as the fish was concerned, is that they caught him; so far as the captor was concerned, that he weighed five-and-twenty pounds, seven ounces, and eleven-fifteenths.

Digitized by Google

After the excitement of the capture, Messieurs Kype and Thornbury, B.A., made a discovery. It was freezing hard. The rings of the rod where the wet line had passed in and out enclosed rapidly thickening inner rings of ice; the line was stiffened.

"You've done very well, old fellow," Harvey said; "suppose we go ashore now. We have worked our way far across the broad, and it will take us some time to get back again. We shall find Rory champing by the boat-house, and the good wife and bairns will be on the look-out."

"Agreed," said the other. "Enough's as good as a feast."

A sip from the pocket-flask sealed the bargain. Thornbury stored away his tackle, wound up the winch, unjointed the rod, and announced himself ready and willing to go.

"I'm afraid I've been very selfish, dear boy," he now said. "You've been fagging for me all day, and I never offered you a turn with the rod, nor gave you a chance with the gun."

Idiot that he was to touch that mainspring!

"Well," slowly but not reluctantly remarked his friend, "perhaps if we pull silently in-shore here, before we cross over, we may get a shot at something that is worth the taking to show the people at the Manor. There are only four or five cartridges in my pouch; I wouldn't bring more for fear of temptation. I'll tell you what, though, with a little hard weather we shall have these waters swarming with wild-fowl. Pull slowly, Thornbury; don't rattle your oars in the rowlocks as if they were castanets."

"Slowly it is," he said, nautical if nothing else.

"Good," he continued. "I shouldn't be a bit surprised if this year we came back to the old times when you could buy ducks at tenpence a pair. When the flights are good, I

Digitized by Google

can assure you, Thornbury, these lakes are visited by tens of thousands of birds in a night."

A man must be flinty, I take it, if he could witness such enthusiasm as that of Harvey Kype without sidling gradually within its influence. Facing him as Thornbury did he could see his honest eyes beaming at the thought of the feathered hosts that journeyed to those parts when hard times drove them to a great winter invasion. Most likely the B.A.'s honest eye beamed too; he certainly listened with pleasurable content (the pike being beneath the thwarts), while he pulled softly into a small creek that penetrated the reedy barrier.

"Hush a moment," commanded Harvey.

And he hushed. They were now in one of those clear lanes of deep water by which this singular series of lakes is connected for miles at a stretch, and the watery pathway was so narrow, and the reeds so high, that the men were very effectually concealed.

After a pause Harvey smiled, and placed the gun ready to hand. He had often astonished his friends by a mysterious gift enabling him to understand the language of birds. What to them was an unintelligible noise, was to him information, music. The cry of a bird revealed to him something more than its species—it sometimes warned him of its intentions, and told him its feelings and aspirations. So now—

"Ducks," he said; "and they are just settling between themselves whether they shall go into the next broad, or betake themselves to the Mill Marsh at the other end of this. Ah! they've heard us. The old woman has ceased her loud talk, and there isn't a cackle amongst a hundred of them now."

It was not a wild duck, however, that would detain

Digitized by Google

Harvey now. His larder was, so to speak, full of them. Thornbury knew well enough what he wanted. He had expressed a wish to have in his collection a Paget's Pochard, and that is a description of fowl not to be bagged every day.

They stole cautiously through the passage and paused, holding on by the reeds at the mouth of the second lake, Turlingham Broad by name. It behoved them to be wary. The Dunbird is one of the most artful of aquatic birds, as any professional fowler will tell you. When every other kind has been enticed into the decoy-pipe, Master Pochard either remains without or dives and retreats before he can be captured. At the Manor, they had eaten of this bird on the previous evening, and agreed that in flavour, as in appearance, he was eminently worthy of comparison with the famous canvas-back duck of America. It was in discussion over the dainty morsel Thornbury had mentioned his desire to have that rare variety, Paget's Pochard. Hence the present action.

"Dunbirds, as I live!" whispered Harvey, pointing to the centre of the lake. They could hear their widgeon-like note, softened by distance, and see them upon the water in considerable numbers, scattered too over a large space.

Harvey Kype's blood was up, and the passage overhead of a goodly skein of geese did not at all tend to keep it down. Pulling stealthily, first down by the reeds as a flank movement and then out into the open, the sportsmen thought neither of home nor beauty. To shorten the story, however, their stalking was fruitless; Harvey had predicted as much, though a chance shot was possible, if not probable.

"It is darkening very suddenly," Thornbury said.

"Yes; and here comes a snowstorm," ejaculated his companion.

Digitized by Google

The snowstorm came and took them completely by surprise. It was driven down the broad from the north by a high wind, that grew into a gale in a few minutes. The B.A. had often read of the blinding attributes of snow, and was now fated to learn by bitter experience that it was something more than a poetical phrase. It seemed that in a few seconds they were completely wrapped up in snow that came from every point of the compass, and that whirled upwards as well as downwards, the flakes fighting and dancing in the maddest fashion.

"Where are the rugs?" Harvey asked.

"In the bow of the boat, under the waterproof," the other answered, turning round to bring them forth.

"Heavens! you have let the oars go adrift."

Alas! too true. Buffeted by snow and wind, Thornbury had overbalanced himself, tumbled backwards into the bottom of the boat, and given the little sturdy oars such an impetus that they disappeared like darts into the water, and came up probably several yards from the boat. I say probably, because the storm still wrapped the two men in its pitiless folds, and shut them in to themselves.

"This is serious," Harvey said, looking around and sorrowfully referring to his watch. "It will soon be dark; we have no oars; there is not a board in the boat that will do for paddling, not even a stretcher; we can't see our hands before us; it snows and blows harder every minute; in half an hour it will be black as pitch, and we are driving to some place or other at a very decent rate."

He was a sound judge; it was exceedingly serious, and Lord Chief Justice Cockburn himself could not have summed up the evidence more pointedly. They were in for it indeed. After all their rosy visions and promises and

Digitized by Google

expectations, the end of all appeared to be Christmas Eve in a punt!

Night came on apace, and something more, and the battle of snowflakes raged incessantly, the only difference being that whereas at first the combatants were small and hard—the militia, let us say, of the *corps d'armée*—they were now the guardsmen of the force—large white blossoms of snow that smote you with a decisive pat, and stuck with more tenacity than was at all pleasant to the exposed portions of the face.

"Thank goodness that farmer's child had a trick of making dolls' beds and dresses of our rugs," said Harvey. "You see, things are not so bad" (he had to shout this as through a speaking trumpet) "as they might be. But for the little girl's propensities for meddling with our property the rugs would have gone on with the cart, and we should perish with the cold. Come aft, Thornbury, and cheer up. Let's huddle together under the rugs, and defy fate."

They made the very best of their position; but to his latest day Thornbury says he shall not forget the horrors of that Christmas Eve. Harvey could not conceal from him that he was ill at ease. He laughed, or made believe to laugh, and drank healths out of the flask, but he was all the time thinking of that scene at the Manor House—the ruddy glow of the fire, the subdued light of the old-fashioned lamps, the holly and mistletoe, the anxious gudewife, wretched and hoping against hope, the children frightened, and dinner spoiling. Ah me! and all this through a moment's clumsiness, to which Harvey Kype made not the ghost of a reference. Thornbury would have been grateful had he clubbed him with his breechloader.

He may not have intended to punish the author of the

Digitized by Google

mishap by a succession of unintentional backhanders, but his conversation, by reason of its very cheerfulness, had that effect upon Thornbury. Under the rugs, the wind shrieking and the snow sweeping and circling as much as ever, he would break out thus, in the gentlest of tones—

"Sorry, old fellow, about the yule log. We're bound to miss that, anyhow. It is, as I think the wife told you, a particular custom of ours. The yule log orthodox might be either of oak or ash; but in the olden time it was the fashion to light it on Christmas Day, keep it burning for an hour, then take it off and preserve it for the following year. We had a great discussion a few years ago as to whether we should have oak or ash, and resolved, in full household session, to burn, as a compromise, an ashen log on Christmas Eve, and an oaken billet on Christmas Day. There's a capital log for to-night, but I know they won't put it on if we are not there. Why don't you smoke?"

Then they would smoke through holes in the wrappers, and after a decent interval of silence the forgiving victim would resume—

"That collection of mine is looking up famously, and Alice gives me most valuable help in the artistic furnishing of the cases. Since you were here last I've set up the osprey, marsh harrier, Arctic tern, knot, Bewick swan, Temminck's stint, and a lovely bean goose."

"Oh! hang your goose!" cried Thornbury; "how the dickens can you think of anything at all now? We shall die on this infernal waste of water."

"Well, not immediately at any cost, if we can help it. There is room, though, to fear being frozen in; then we can get ashore on the ice. At present we are driving, slow but sure, to the lower end of the broad; twenty to one, if we don't run ashore, that we slip into the next broad, and so on

Digitized by Google

to the ocean. But cheer up. How thankful we ought to be! If the wind did not lash the water, we should have been frozen in long before this."

Grazing against something as the punt passed on, the belated ones popped simultaneously from beneath their covering and grasped the reeds, thankful that they had at least the means of keeping themselves from travelling. The wind shrieked less; became only reasonably strong, changed from howling to grumbling, and, finally, in a sobbing whine, scuttled away across the flats to the sea. The snowflakes gave up fighting, agreed to make it a drawn battle, and fell peaceably without interfering with each other's freedom.

Harvey was equal to the occasion. It was nine o'clock; in a couple of hours they might be at Kype Manor, though that was not likely.

"Now, Thornbury," he said, "let us take another pull at the flask, light our pipes, and act." Then, as he kindled his bird's-eye, he remarked slyly between the puffs, "How picturesque it all looks in the spotless veil which conceals what is unlovely!"

"No more of that, for mercy's sake!" Thornbury implored.

"How ethereal the smoke hovering, etc.," he continued.

Surly as Thornbury was, he could not but acknowledge that the hit was palpable and fair. They made fun over it together, and hauled the boat along the edge of the reeds —hauled, hauled, hauled, at snail's pace, for two mortal hours, and, as they discovered afterwards, hauled nearly round the entire broad. What flights of wildfowl there were after the storm! Harvey talks to this day of the teams of ducks, rushes of dunbirds, coveys of coots and greylag geese, that doubly darkened the night, and kept the water alive until the frost began to tell upon it.

Hard upon midnight a water passage hove in sight on

Digitized by Google

the larboard bow. They rounded into it, crackling through the wafer ice, still progressing by means of the reeds. It reminded them of the habitual drunkard, whose only means of reaching home is to place his back against the wall directly he gets outside the tavern-door, and slowly trundle himself in an upright position along the fronts of the houses until he rolls against his own door. How long they were to progress in this fashion was a very uncomfortable problem to face. They were embarked upon an apparently illimitable enterprise. Penetrating that dense forest of reeds was out of the question.

"Hark! That's Giles's watchdog," said Harvey. "We are near the hamlet. Ah! you may talk of the joy-inspiring features of spring; you——"

Crack! crack!

The mocker had cut his mockery short; he had taken up his gun, and like lightning brought down a bird that rose out of, or somewhere near, the reeds.

"That's your bird," he said. "It has dropped in the reeds. We must fetch it."

The little boat cleft the tall reeds easily; the pochard was, in good luck, retrieved by Thornbury almost at once; and, best of all, they discovered a method of approaching the shore. Worst of all, however, they had to get overboard and plunge up to their waists in mud and water to drag the boat after them.

Mr. Giles, the worthy farmer of the picturesque hamlet, stared somewhat under his tasselled nightcap when the gentlemen from the Manor threw shot at his casement, and calmly stated their case. Hearing their determination to proceed at once, he roused up a carter, and despatched them in a neat two-wheeled vehicle without springs, and which had been recently employed in the conveyance of artificial manure.

Digitized by Google

A pretty figure they must have cut! The ladies were all in the hall porch waiting for them, and the place was in a blaze of light. Tracy had met them at the end of the drive, where, in shamefacedness, they alighted from the savoury chariot, and his loud laughter had forewarned the ladies that there was no mischief to grieve over.

The returned prodigals advanced, pretending to enjoy the joke, Harvey with Paget's Pochard dangling in his right hand, Thornbury, B.A., with the large pike trailing upon the snow from his left hand. Their grinning attempt at laughter must have been ghastly indeed. They were thickly caked with frozen mud of a rich black colour, and the smears on their faces presented a fine example of light and shade. As they slunk off to the kitchen, the worthy spectators of the wanderers' return laughed until the tears streamed down their cheeks.

That was right. The sportsmen had, in their pretended enjoyment of their mishaps, advanced upon the party with a gaily-said "Merry Christmas to you all," and, to do everybody justice, although it was two o'clock in the morning, a merrier beginning of Christmas was never witnessed.

Digitized by Google

PART II.

NOTES BETWEEN ENGLAND AND AUSTRALIA.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

MY OCEAN LOG.

IN SEVEN ENTRIES.

FIRST ENTRY.

FROM NEWCASTLE TO PORT SAID.

ENGLAND is doubly dear to the man who has left it; yet it has, when the fit seizes it—and that is not seldom—a villainous climate. In days to come, when home-sickness gnaws at the heart, the emigrant may yearn even for English fogs and east winds, but never can he desire to pass through two such days as those which marked the commencement of this long voyage of mine from Newcastle to Brisbane, capital of Queensland.

The Tyne is a fine river—for business purposes; and, as aquatic men are aware, some excellent boating is done upon its turbid tide. Far up in the country the young stream adds to the beauty of Northumberland landscape, and affords good sport to the angler. But the scenery from Newcastle to Tynemouth is, to put it in the mildest form, depressing—ay, depressing under the most flattering conditions. The

Digitized by Google

patriot who loves to behold material signs of his country's prosperity cannot do better than steam up the Tyne; the artist going forth in search of the beautiful should choose another way. The outward-bound traveller wishing for final glimpses of home that shall be pleasant to recall upon distant shores could not do a worse thing than sail from the Tyne on a foggy January afternoon, when the smoke hangs like a funeral pall over the grimy docks and dingy river banks, and the pervading gloom penetrates one's inner being.

The east coast of England has neither the variety of the indented western shores of our islands, nor the bold characteristics of the southern cliff-land, but it has its agreeable points. At any rate, it is better than none. But good or bad it availed us little, as, the land wholly obscured, our noble vessel crawled through the foggy night at slow speed, the dismal steam-whistle hooting at frequent intervals to warn other belated ships of our neighbourhood. After trying our best during four-and-twenty hours of thick fog and piercing cold, the anchor was cast, and, according to the maritime law in such cases made and provided, the clangorous bell, in lieu of the whistle, was kept going night and day. There is—as we had often heard and read, but now knew from chilling experience—no such dangerous or disagreeable navigation as that in the shoal water of which the Goodwin Sands are a dreaded and terminating feature.

We were lying somewhere near a fishing ground, which to me was a kind of native heath. Now and then my old friends the fishing smacks came and went ghostlike, magnified by the fog into gigantic and weird figures.

During a partial clearance of the thickness, a smack appeared a short distance at sea, and we found some occupation in watching the men shooting their long line for cod-fishing. This is purely a winter pursuit of the East Anglian fishermen,

Digitized by Google

and is by some conducted not far from shore. The majority of the fleet which in the herring season I had seen busy with their drift nets were now trawling in the North Sea. The trim yacht-like cutter which in the afternoon sailed across our bows towards land was one of the fleet carriers whose business it is to convey the smacksman's hauls to shore. As far distant as the eye could stretch in the miserable yellow haze you might descry a keg-like buoy floating in the sea, conspicuous afar by reason of a blue flag fluttering from its head.

This was the termination of the cod-line which we had watched the men in the boat shoot out from the smack. It was an immensely long line, and attached to it by snoods six or seven feet long were probably a hundred or a hundred and twenty hooks baited with sand launce, mussel, or morsels of fresh white fish. Cod is the one sea-fish that is caught only by hook and line as a matter of habitual business, and when the creature does bite he takes the bait freely. I have heard of three hundred fine cod captured by one boat during a single night of long-line fishing.

The line having been shot across the tide, the crew of our smack in view proceeded to fish with hand-lines from the deck of their craft; and in default of better employment our first officer kindly got out such tackle as the steamer carried, and we attempted a little angling on our own account. But our lines were too coarse and we had nothing but butcher's meat for bait. To state this is tantamount to saying that our labours were in vain, for the small fish which alone were likely to cross our station were not to be caught in so ignominious a manner. Nevertheless we tried perseveringly, and deserved better fortune than befell us in our last bit of angling in English waters.

Ah! how well one knew whither those birds were bound;

Digitized by Google

nor was it without a pang that one speculated as to when, if ever, one should again breathe the pure air of those splendid Broads which in winter teem with wild fowl, and from whose waters, in the quietude of many a summer morning, one had captured the shining bream until one's arms ached with the exercise. Doubtless, as the short January day was closing, and as we paced the deck and called up many a delightful angling reminiscence, the gunners and punters were out upon the muddy banks of the creeks, in their flat-bottomed boats, looking after ducks and geese, and bagging an occasional *rara avis* driven thither during the storms of the previous month.

Why, but a week since, a piscatorial friend in one of the lovable angling clubs of town had filled me with envy and desire as he told his experiences with yacht and gun upon this coast, and to-day each land-bound bird seemed to be a messenger from that snug room with Frank Buckland's grand cast of the giant pike taken in Windsor Park on the sideboard, a tray of fine perch, pike, and roach fresh from the Thames on the table, and Rolfe's inimitable pictures (the genial artist was himself one of the company) interspersed with the stuffed fish on the walls. Oh! excellent true Waltonians, Stanley anglers, and West End Piscatorials, when shall I look upon your like again?

It was not till the morning of the third day that we were emancipated from the bondage of fog and shoal, and able to put our pilot over the side in the Downs. Then the voyage commenced in good earnest; familiar landmarks passed in review; at night the brilliant beacon of St. Catherine's at the back of the Isle of Wight gleamed boldly over the waters, and a soft hazé of light brooding over the land marked the whereabouts of Ventnor, where, one might dare assert, midwinter though it were, you could find a bouquet

Digitized by Google

of flowers in the open air. Next evening, as a farewell token, came Start Point.

One traveller was there upon the deck who looked long and wistfully towards the Devonshire shore, albeit its outlines were indistinct. That wistful looker was, on the feet of fancy, roaming booted and basketed over bonny Dartmoor, picking out its delicate little trout from the purling brooks; was climbing the Tors into an atmosphere of dry champaign, to feast his eye upon the lovely panorama that stretched between his moorland standpoint and the Cornish hills in the west. In his pocket-book there was, as there had been by accident during the two previous years, a specimen fly known to Devonshire anglers as the Meavy Red, and he must forsooth bring it forth to inspect it in the uncertain flicker of the binnacle lamp, and wonder if that tiny artificial insect would again be cast upon any waters.

Eight bells cut the reverie short. It was appropriate that Milton's lines should that very evening fall in my way, for a truer description of what was lying in our wake could not be:—

> "Straight mine eye hath caught new pleasures,
> While the landscape round it measures
> Russet lawns and fallows gray,
> Where the nibbling flocks do stray;
> Mountains on whose barren breast
> The lab'ring clouds do often rest;
> Meadows trim with daises pied,
> Shallow brooks and rivers wide,
> Towers and battlements it sees
> Bosom'd high in tufted trees."

And now being fairly at sea, may I be allowed the luxury of open confession? I have no objection to plead that there is something more resounding—call it pretentious if you will—than correct in the title chosen for these chapters.

Digitized by Google

A "log" should be distinguished, above all its other qualities, by the painful minuteness of its details; it should bristle with facts and abound with figures. In this sense "My Ocean Log" will be a rank imposition; it is only as the fancy hits me that I enter my paragraphs, and it does not hang heavy upon my conscience if the topic which intrudes itself be but indirectly connected with the voyage.

Would the fortunate gentlemen of England who sit at home at ease be surprised to discover that in these days an ocean trip is apt to be an extremely humdrum affair? A journey of between sixteen and seventeen thousand miles, extending over, say, a couple of months, might perhaps be expected to produce a heavy crop of exciting adventures. But such is not my experience. A veritable log of our voyage from England to Australia would be, no doubt, more interesting than Bradshaw's "Railway Guide," but not much. The fact is, there is nothing new in these days: we know all about everything; and there is no denying that steam, while it has given us rapidity of communication and conveniences and luxuries which never entered into the conceptions of the mariners of the wooden-wall period, has introduced a wonderfully prosaic element into travel. The man who used to sail round the world was a hero; now he is merely a globe-trotter. For which and other reasons I post up "My Ocean Log" after my own fashion, and cherish the assumption that the reader knows as much of the mere maps of the route as the writer himself.

Suppose we take, then, at a bound, the Bay of Biscay? This is an expanse of water with which all the terrors of the ocean are associated, and, as we know full well, many a gallant ship has been drawn down into its treacherous depths. But the experienced sailors on board assured me that storms in "the Bay" are the exception rather than the rule: that

Digitized by Google

they are awful when they do rage, but that on the whole there are many other latitudes more dreaded by the mariner.

We naturally expected to meet with a rude Biscayan reception in the month of January, but we encountered nothing unpleasant save a ludicrous rolling motion, due rather to some previous disturbance than to present tempest. The dark billows had never a crest, and were scarcely curled by the breeze; but they were long and high notwithstanding —very innocent and smiling of countenance, but downright teasers in their actual effects. A steadier or better sea-boat, or a better handled, than the Eastern and Australian Company's R.M.S. *Queensland** never sailed the seas, but she was compelled to give in to the Bay of Biscay; after a few gallant attempts at resistance she rolled until the decks described angles of any number of degrees.

If you intend to travel on the ocean never write a book about shipwrecks. That was an enormity I once perpetrated, as I had good cause to remember during the first night's roll and racket in the Bay of Biscay O! Disasters that had long since, as I imagined, escaped my memory were brought to mind by some evil spirit, which took a delight in marshalling before me the details in their most harrowing form.

"Look you, my brave comrade," it would whisper, "you pretend that you are enjoying the fun of this midnight uproar, the portmanteau rushing after the hat-box, the glasses crashing in the saloon, the cabin floor the arena of contending pieces of furniture. Remember, it was in the Bay of Biscay that the *Kent*, East Indiaman, was lost through just such rolling as this; here went down the ill-fated *Amazon;* and what of the *London* with her 230 lives, or the *Captain* with her 500 brave blue jackets, off Cape Finisterre yonder?"

* Run down and lost, within a few months, on the Australian coast, by a clumsily-sailed steamer.

Digitized by Google

In this manner one of the memories of bygone work arose to haunt the dreams and harry the dozer. Then falling half asleep, I became oblivious of storm and sea, and dreamt I was jack-fishing at Luton Hoo, a privilege so rare that I strove to make the most of it. It seemed to be an immense float that was bobbing up and down; but there are big fish in those waters, and the bait, from the motion it imparted to the float, must have been lusty and lively. By-and-by this large round float began to sink lower and lower and lower; what a splendid run it was!

Ay. The circular porthole upon which I had fixed a dreamy gaze had with the roll of the ship gone down as my berth came up, and the water obscuring it for a while accounted for its final disappearance. Altogether that was a funny night in the Bay of Biscay, and the steward, I noticed, had not many passengers to wait upon at the next breakfast table.

The sea-gulls, being the only living creatures to look at for days together, obtained a lion's share of attention. You cannot angle for gulls as you do for the wandering albatross; that is to say, you may angle for them if you choose, but it will be to no purpose. The gull is a sufficiently pretty bird, but it is not what is called interesting. And what is the use of shooting it? Few commanders of a large steamer would be willing to stop their ship in her proud career of twelve knots an hour, and man and lower a boat, to pick up the fowl which an idle passenger had shot. Else we might have brought down several which, wheeling over the stern, presented that desirable under-view of the breast which is anything but favourable to the bird under the observation of a good marksman. We had gulls at all times around us in the Bay of Biscay and the Mediterranean, and the pretty black and white winged kittiwake was frequent as we neared the Spanish coast.

Digitized by Google

In the Mediterranean one afternoon I noticed a fine brown-backed fellow amongst the flock that followed us to pick up whatever unconsidered trifles the cook gave to the waves. The bird's left leg was dangling, as if broken—a particularly noticeable disarrangement of the gull's physical economy, considering the compact manner in which in flight its pink legs and feet are tucked up under its shapely body. In other respects, too, the bird was noticeable; it was larger than its comrades, its wings were stronger, and it was always in the forefront, and boldest of all in circling over the poop. About the same time next day, what must have been the identical bird still flew in our wake, and there it remained at dusk. In the four-and-twenty hours the steamer had made 250 knots in the teeth of a strong head-wind; it was almost incredible that a bird could have performed this feat of endurance, but the evidence was overwhelming.

A starling boarded us in the Mediterranean, a stray, panting, tired-out castaway, that must have hailed from the dusky mountainous coast of Algeria, about twenty miles off. Starlings are not in the habit of making journeys except in large flocks, and one would like to have heard the story, perhaps tragical, perhaps romantic, of this feathered waif's unfortunate flight. It was at its last extremity when it reached the ship and perched upon the gunwale of the captain's gig; after a few minutes' rest it was able to take a feeble flight into the shrouds, to which higher refuge it was driven by an attempted capture by one of the crew. The bird, in lieu of the trim and prettily-marked plumage of good condition, was a rumpled mass of faded feathers. The men chivied it from point to point, until it reached the mainyard. When the field was clear it descended, very warily watching all the time, and enjoyed a hearty feed from the poultry coop. It took leave of the ship some time during the night.

Digitized by Google

A day or two previously, a couple of large hornets gave us a passing call, having been tempted fifteen or eighteen miles from their sunny haunts in Estremadura by a light wind from the land. Under similar conditions butterflies have been seen over a hundred miles at sea.

A very jolly set of dogs the porpoises appear to be: quite the Mark Tapleys of the sea. Even in captivity, when deprived of the society of their playfellows, they are admirable examples of making the best of things. A porpoise with whom I was once on intimate calling terms, that lived for a while and died generally lamented in the Brighton Aquarium, used to dart from the farthest limits of its spacious tank at the sound of a whistle, and would take its food gently and mannerly from Mr. Henry Lee's hands. This intelligent member of the whale family was a mature specimen, weighing about seventy pounds, and it ultimately died of diseased liver—the old story, too much to eat and nothing to do, The sea is their proper sphere, and right pleasant it was to watch them in every variety of gambol.

Porpoises we saw everywhere—members of the same order, at any rate, though perhaps of different species. Sometimes they would be small, and sometimes seven feet long, but, light or heavy as their carcases might be, their spirits were at what Tom Moore would call the "highest top-sparkle." They, of course, have their feelings like other folk, and cannot always be in the same mood. Thus to-day they would rise gently like trout, merely touching the surface to blow, and disappearing noiselessly the moment that necessary function was performed. To-morrow they would leap several feet clear out of the water, as if engaged in a high-jump contest, and at such times we could take stock, not only of their sleek hides, but of their sly little eyes. In the morning they would be seen rolling over lazily with that arched back

Digitized by Google

which leads many people to entertain a very erroneous opinion of the animal's shape; in the afternoon they would try their speed against that of the ship, and in every case would out-distance her.

We entertained ourselves by backing our favourites, and some excellent sport they gave us. A shoal of eight on one occasion ranged up close to the ship, and without any apparent effort kept a level pace until, apparently satisfying themselves that the *Queensland* was their inferior, they gave a frisky plunge out of the water, shot ahead at the rate of twelve miles an hour, and in very wantonness darted across the stem before going down into the blue depths with a lively flourish. In the shoal you would generally find one or two specially "larky" individuals, who were clever at maintaining a sinuous course, at vaulting head over heels, at imitating under water the flight of a bird, and at turning and twisting, so that you could contrast the dark greenish-brown with the dirty white underclothing.

If sometimes they rose like trout, at others they would, also like trout, of a sudden, without any apparent cause, cease playing, and withdraw from our gaze. The smallest porpoises were those off Cape St. Vincent. They were, perhaps, under twenty pounds in weight. The largest were leaping high in the air off more southern seas, and there were specimens amongst them that could not be far short of two hundredweight each.

The good Saint Anthony must have been a good deal of a humourist if he really preached that sermon yonder to the fishes. By great good luck, one of the books in the ship's library contained Addison's translation of the famous homily, and after enjoying it over a Sunday afternoon cigar near the pigeon-haunted island of Pantellaria, I copied an extract or two for the benefit of such readers as have not met with the composition.

Digitized by Google

The saint, it should be known, disgusted because the heretics paid no heed to his discourses, went down to the shores of the Adriatic and summoned a finny congregation. Forthwith the fish came swimming around in multitudes, ranged themselves in their tribes and households apart into "a very beautiful congregation," and listened with devout attention to the saint. He, wondering and delighted at the spectacle, found a secret sweetness distilling upon his soul and an inner prompting that made him discourse.

The legend narrates that the preacher, employing the orthodox mode of beginning, namely, "My dearly beloved fish," went on to point out that fishes have to be thankful for many special mercies. "For," he observed, "notwithstanding you are comprehended under the name of reptiles, partaking of a middle nature between stones and beasts, and imprisoned in the deep abyss of waters; notwithstanding you are tossed among billows, thrown up and down by tempests, deaf to hearing, dumb to speech, and terrible to behold; notwithstanding, I say, these natural disadvantages, the Divine Greatness shows itself in you after a very wonderful manner. In you are seen the mighty mysteries of an infinite goodness. The Holy Scripture has also made use of you as the types and shadows of some profound sacrament."

The preacher next reminded the fishes from Whom they received being, life, motion, and sense, and, in compliance with their own inclinations, the whole world of waters for their habitation, observing of the latter—

"It is He that furnished it with lodgings, chambers, caverns, grottoes, and such magnificent retirements as are not to be met with in the seats of kings or in the palaces of princes. You have the waters for your dwelling, a clear transparent element brighter than crystal; you can see from its deepest bottom everything that passes on its surface; you

Digitized by Google

have the eyes of a lynx or an Argus, you are guided by a secret and unerring principle, delighting in everything that is beneficial to you, and avoiding everything that may be hurtful; you are carried on by a hidden instinct to preserve yourselves and to propagate your species; you obey in all your actions, works, and motions the dictates and suggestions of Nature, without the least repugnance or contradiction.

"The colds of winter and the heats of summer are equally incapable of molesting you. A serene or a clouded sky is indifferent to you. Let the earth abound in fruit or be cursed with scarcity, it has no influence on your welfare. You live secure in rains, thunders, lightnings, and earthquakes; you have no concerns in the blossoms of spring or in the glowings of summer, in the fruits of autumn, or in the frosts of winter. You are not solicitous about hours or days, months or years, the variableness of the weather, or the change of seasons."

At the conclusion of Saint Anthony's sermon the fishes, every angler will be proud to hear, bowed their heads with becoming humility, moving their bodies up and down as if approving of the good words that had been spoken.

Digitized by Google

SECOND ENTRY.

THE SUEZ CANAL AND RED SEA.

IF this chapter should meet the eye of a lover of angling, who is likely to be spending any time in the Suez Canal, may I suggest that he should not forget to include fishing-rod and tackle in his kit? From what I saw and heard of the abundance of fish in those waters it would, indeed, be almost worth the while of a man of leisure to go to Port Said or Ismailia for the express purpose of sport, especially if he also cared for wild-fowl shooting.

Lazy Arab fishermen, in high-prowed boats, not twenty yards from the Port Said wharves, standing picturesquely in the bows of their boats with nought but a wisp of cloth round their loins, made feeble casts with their nets, and were instantly rewarded with a dozen or twenty fish. This was enough to satisfy their moderate wants, and, their bronze skins shining with wet, they pulled leisurely ashore, cooked their spoil over the embers, squatted on their hams to eat their meal, and fell asleep where they ate, for the rest of the day. Mullet were plentiful, and a large fish, salmon-

Digitized by Google

shaped and prettily tinted with pink and gray. Sea bream, and a number of fish new to me, were on sale in the fish market. In the Arab village the native fish shops were in the open air, and generally by the side of a gutter not half so savoury as the fried fish. The negro boys seemed to have a sweet tooth in the direction of fried fish, and so did the spectral curs which, in Port Said, as in other Egyptian and Turkish towns, do the work of scavengers.

The canal itself swarms with fish, which are taken in considerable numbers by the sailors anchoring in the sidings for the night. The mullet rarely take bait, but the salmon-shaped fish above referred to, sea bream, a sea perch, and cat-fish, are not at all fastidious. They prefer a whitebait description of small fry first, after this a cockle, but do not reject pork or beef. The native anglers use fine hooks and lines, and no rods. Had we not by ill luck consigned our rods and spinning-flights to the hold, "not to be used on the voyage," I am convinced we might have employed our time most pleasantly and profitably, during the many hours we were doomed to linger in the canal.

The native fishermen, chiefly Egyptian-Arabs, might be seen stealing silently into the canal at nightfall, and at very early morn they would be in the market with the results of their night's hook-and-line work—in some instances 50 lbs. of fish and over, all of good size, and, until breakfast time, good quality too, and of a dozen different varieties. After nine or ten o'clock, fish in hot climates can no longer be called fresh. The fishing is conducted on the old-fashioned system to which we are accustomed at our English watering-places, and with the varying fortune to which fishermen in all climes and times are resigned. The Oriental—and I presume the Port Said Arab is of that generic multitude—does not lust after a meat-laden table, but is generally

Digitized by Google

satisfied with very frugal fare; fish, however, are favourite morsels everywhere.

At Ismailia, we contrived to rig up some kind of tackle—cross-stick, gut hooks, and ordinary deep-sea lines. The promises held out to us were not realized; but I did contrive to catch a brace of the beautiful fish that, I hold, would have taken a spinning or live bait as keenly as pike or trout. The French pilots informed me that it is called the Bitter Lake trout, and that it is abundant in the canal and all the lakes connected with it. But for its perch-like dorsal fin it might pass anywhere for a well-fed, handsome, deeply speckled sea-trout; and I can answer for its game character, although my captives were not over half a pound in weight. The seamen anchoring in the lake frequently, according to trustworthy accounts, catch fish enough in an hour or two to supply the tables for a couple of days. The Waltonians in turbans and flowing robes, who came on board in the mornings with their night's spoil, thought nothing of fish of this kind 8 or 9 lbs. in weight, and splendid specimens they were. I dare say I ought to be able to give the name of this fish, but I must confess it was new to me. It seemed as plentiful in the Greater and Lesser Bitter Lakes as in Lake Timsah; and, on the latter half of the canal, nude fishermen, sitting on the sand or in their rude feluccas, and baking hard in the sun, waited patiently for a communication from the bottom to their fore-finger.

At Ismailia one afternoon—for a break-down of the engines, brand-new from a Tyne shipbuilding yard, detained us in Lake Timsah for eight-and-forty hours—I cut me a reed from the wayside, a lissom cane-like rod, fifteen feet in length, and tapering from an inch in diameter to a point. To this I attached an ancient fly-tracing, and having cut the wings and body from a cinnamon fly that killed a fine trout

Digitized by Google

last year in a Surrey meadow knee-deep in grass and flowers, and having, by the gift of a few centimes, persuaded a black-eyed young Arabling to fetch a small heap of cockles, I proceeded to angle from the jetty, in the company of a couple of donkey boys whose love of sport tempted them to neglect their duties and to come in for as neat a drubbing, when detected, as any Old World pedagogue would desire. The young rascals, I regret to say, caught nothing but their whacking, while there seemed to be no limit to the number of six-inch fry falling to my share. They were either mullet or a charmingly tinted bream, but always the small fish preying about the woodwork. The engineer of one of the pilot boats stepped ashore, and in a minute caught two silversides, just the things for live or dead bait fishing, and for that purpose he used them, threading a large single hook through the skin of the side and hurling the bait with a pound and a half of lead far out into the lake. He said he generally took a fish as long as his arm when he tried.

But, for a moment, I must leave such trifles as natural history jottings, to which I had at one time intended to confine myself, and look at the Suez Canal from a practical stand-point. It was not a bad idea to speak of it as a continuous dock nearly ninety miles long, though the comparison was decidedly uncomplimentary to the genus dock. Whatever else the famous canal may be, it certainly cannot boast any charms of landscape scenery. A thread of silver shot through a vast fabric of brown sand, it is still essentially part only of a desert whole. Yet it should have some attractions to the traveller using it for the first time, and this quite apart from the new interest felt by politicians and financiers now that, more than ever since its establishment, the scheme has become deserving of the original title—"*Compagnie Universelle du Canal Maritime de Suez.*"

Digitized by Google

In a small way, here you may consider yourself to be on the threshold of the east; from the moment your ship leaves her moorings in Port Said harbour the strangely-fascinating life of the land of the morning sun begins to unfold itself. The very dreariness of the outlook will probably be a striking, if not welcome, change to the Englishman who may, for the first time in his life, really know how to appreciate the sweet shady lanes, lovely woods, and fair meadows of his native land. More than this, spite of the notorious sterility of the isthmus, the man who makes fair use of his powers of observation may enjoy some effective and many curious sights.

No doubt he must be somewhat of an optimist to do this, for it is more than likely that the majority of travellers will opine that a little—a very little—of the Suez Canal is enough and to spare. The man of business, for example, firmly believing in the creed that time is money, will regard every moment of delay beyond the two days which should be the duration of the fortunate *voyageur's* transit, as an experience against which it would not be unreasonable to rail; every day beyond this limit will be a hardship grievous to be borne, since by that time all the novelty will be worn threadbare, and camels, Arabs, and landscape will have lost all their picturesqueness, and become execrated objects in a wide picture of desolation.

Sometimes a ship is eight days passing through the canal, but this, of course, is an extreme case. The steamer in which I myself performed the trip was two days in making the first forty miles, and the vessel which preceded us was delayed six days and nights in the canal through the eccentricities of a Dutch trader, which manifested a perpetual desire to thrust her snub nose into one bank, and her bald round stern into the other, leaving any ship that followed

Digitized by Google

the pleasant alternative of leaping over her or awaiting her tardy emancipation.

Of course you will run ashore at Port Said, if you have the chance, though you probably will not remain long within its unsavoury borders. It is not an inviting town. However, the nimble, half-naked, and wholly uncleansed gentry who bring your coal on board get through their work in an incredibly short space of time, considering that the supply is transferred from a barge alongside in baskets borne on men's shoulders. Fruit, too—ever welcome at sea—may be got at Port Said; melons, oranges, lemons, and dates all the year round, and something better in season; also vegetables, excellent fish, and general stores. Port Said is, at any rate, serviceable. The place just now is said to be overrun with rascally Greeks, who are ready, at a moment's notice, to cut your throat, rifle your pockets, or scuttle your ship. A few nights before my arrival a youth had made a pile of money at a roulette table; next morning he was found murdered at the upper part of the town, and he had no effects on his person.

In saying, however, that of course you will run ashore at Port Said, I am assuming that you take no ladies with you. Even the best part of the town, if there be a best where everything seems to be bad, is no place for any person of refined tastes; and those who remain on board had much better not be too curious in examining the wares which rascally Europeans (dirty Frenchmen and women, or bleareyed Turks) hawk about the decks. The places of amusement seemed to be of the lowest description, and I doubt whether in any tavern anything like fair accommodation can be had for man or beast. The streets are foul, the people unwholesome, and the precincts arid desert.

Ever so little greenery at Port Said would be grateful.

Digitized by Google

By the aid of a powerful glass I could make out a half-withered shrub to the east of the Custom-house, otherwise there was nothing growing to be seen. Round about the harbour the red-tiled and white-walled houses are of fairly respectable structure; elsewhere Port Said has a decidedly tumble-down appearance. The long breakwaters by which the port is made approachable no doubt answer their design, and could only have been laid down with much cost and patient labour; but rougher sea-walls were surely never seen. These are typical of the town. It is a motley collection of hastily put together shops and stores; a place of temporary sojourn for the odds and ends of all nations, and a permanent home for none. Surrounded by the desert primeval, and glared upon by a pitiless sun, Port Said is fearfully hot as a residence; no amount of jalousies and verandahs can alter that fact. The trade is precarious, because the customers are here to-day and gone to-morrow. The entire aspect of the place is consequently unsettled. There are some barracks, truly, and soldiers, the former wretched hovels, the latter terrible rapscallions in appearance. I saw a sentry on duty in absolute tatters, and foul swine were tearing at a sewer that ran at his naked feet. The tiles were tumbling off the house of the chief Egyptian official; the civil servants of the Crown in the everlasting fez were writing despatches and documents in a tenement to which a village barn in England would be palatial.

In the Arab village, as they grandiloquently dub it, things were more interesting, because there was no pretence at civilization, and the native Egyptian-Arabs and negroes of every description appeared in the scorching streets in all the unconscious simplicity of their race, and in all the really picturesque variety of costume peculiar to their tribalities. Women covered from head to foot, save the two black

Digitized by Google

roguish eyes which they levelled at the passing foreigners; bronze-legged Egyptians engaged in their favourite occupation of doing nothing; patriarchal Turks squatting on their hams; groups of ebony-faced men from all the torrid regions round the Khedive's dominion; wearers of turbans, fez, skull-cap, and nature's own wool; garments of many colours and varying degrees of cleanliness, and vagabonds of every description—these were to be seen swarming in the main street of the Arab community outside of Port Said.

In a mosque we saw the faithful at their devotions. It was a very rude temple. The long-bearded individual who ascended the dovecote-looking perch to announce the hour of prayer might have been improved by soap and water, but from the earnest response made to his declaration I suspect his harsh accents were

> "Blest as the Muezzin's strains from Mecca's wall
> To pilgrims pure and prostrate at his call."

The council which administers the affairs of the Suez Canal Company last year mooted the necessity of increased expenditure for the purpose of rendering more easy and more rapid the passage of the canal. That this hits the blot you perceive before you have advanced a mile from Port Said. In the early days of the undertaking two objections were made: it was predicted that in a short time the channel must inevitably be filled by drifting sand, and it was declared that the narrowness of the canal would prove a fatal bar to prosperity. The first prediction need not now be considered for a moment, since it has been abundantly proved that there need be no apprehensions on that score. As to the question of narrowness, that is at the present time an all-important consideration.

The business of the company has increased at such a ratio

Digitized by Google

that the enlargement of the canal has become an admitted necessity. During the last five years the tonnage passing through the canal has quadrupled. In March, 1874, there were thirty-three vessels at one time in the canal, and when you consider that the speed of transit must not exceed five miles an hour, and that the sidings are few and far between, you may understand why something should be done. At Port Said I found a general impression that the English Government, in their new-born capacity of large shareholders, would take the initiative in proposing the widening of the canal as an improvement that must be effected if the proprietors would secure from their remarkable enterprise all that it is capable of yielding.

Having taken on board your pilot, you slowly make for the canal. Perhaps, however, I should have mentioned that the trifling ceremony of paying your account to the company is first gone through. Prepayment saves time and simplifies book-keeping. Now, the Suez Canal is a luxury that costs not a little. The tariff has been altered once or twice, but it is now settled at a nominal 10 francs, but actual 14 francs per ton, and 10 francs per head for passengers. Our ship was a moderately large one (2500 tons register), there were next to no passengers, and we took in 150 tons of Welsh coal at 35s. per ton; yet the money paid for canal dues and coaling (the items being included in the same account) amounted to £1176 10s.

At last, then, we are in the canal—barges and lighters under the one bank; rusty cranes, broken-down trucks, and dilapidated iron bars and wheels strewed higgledy-piggledy on the other—Port Said all over. Physically and morally, they never clear away the *débris*. However, we soon get clear of the suburbs.

The shallow sheet of water to the right is what is left of

Digitized by Google

Lake Menzaleh, and the snow-white sea fowl, as we pass, are in patches so plentiful that the expanse looks like a shimmering plain, variegated by beds of daisies. In the distance the graceful latteen sails of the native feluccas flash and fade. Here comes our first camel along the sandy path by the canal. The Arab who leads it wears the universal turban and striped calico robe to his knees, with continuations of unadorned shanks; and the young Bedouin's white teeth gleam out of their copper casket when he observes that I have my field glass levelled at him. The camel is, to be accurate, a dromedary, laden with firewood grubbed out of the grudging desert; the solemn beast passes on with swinging noiseless stride. Next behold a group of fellahs sitting in the sand on the margin of the water. They are naked, save a bit of blue cloth round the loins, and as imperturbable of aspect as their passing friend the dromedary. So our vessel crawls on between sand-banks at first low, but by-and-by varying in height. In one stage they cannot be less than forty feet high. You descry an occasional dromedary, or ass, with natives in attendance; and so joyless is their expression that they increase rather than enlighten the general desolation.

M. de Lesseps has said that not even a fly lives in this desert; and that may well be. There are telegraph poles and wires, however, on one side, and on the other posts on which the distances are marked every tenth of a mile. Here and there a hut may vary the prospect, or one of the stations where the signalman lives; that is the extent of the outlook for miles. At Kintara, where the road to Jerusalem crosses the water, and where a score or so of negroes and Arabs were sitting, motionless as statues, on the Syrian side, the station-house is pretty, and the neatness of the village a great relief to the jaded eye.

Digitized by Google

The canal is well worked and well kept, and is conducted on a principle similar to that of the block system of the English railways. The captain of our steamer received his orders by a code of signals from the station ahead, and the purpose of these tokens during the first two days was that we were to wait in the next siding—a small bay scooped out of the sandbank—until some other vessel signalled from the station beyond had passed. Repeated halts of from one to two hours' duration, and five miles an hour as the maximum speed, severely tried our patience. It might have been worse, however, for the heat (it was in January) was bearable, and we were not, as many are, blinded by sand-storms, although we had taken the precaution to lay in a stock of wire-gauze goggles, which we were assured were the only effectual protection for the eyes.

Ismailia is as pretty as Port Said is ugly. It was pretty, as I saw it in the winter time—thermometer over 80° in the shade—and when the foliage is at its best it must be indeed an oasis in the wilderness. The houses are tasteful, clean finished, and as substantial as they are required for such a climate; the streets are laid out in good order, and the roads are excellent. There are public gardens, pretty boulevards, and well-shrubbed private grounds everywhere. The Greek element crops up like a noxious weed even at Ismailia; but they manage to keep it down, for this is the head-quarters of the Suez Canal Company, and people have to behave themselves accordingly.

The disarrangements in the engines of the steamship, which caused our detention in Lake Timsah a couple of days, gave us many runs ashore. M. de Lesseps has a charming residence here, where he is emperor, and Madame no less empress. The Khedive's palace is a prominent object in the foreground; so is the distant and isolated "grand stand," in

Digitized by Google

which the great personages who attended the opening of the canal were entertained. Ismailia, from the centre of Lake Timsah, is very inviting. A cool avenue of trees, bordered by thickets of tasselled reeds, twenty feet high, leads you across a small canal, through which the water of the sacred Nile is conducted. Gigantic cacti, tree ferns, and similar growths wave high above the tops of the walls. The shops are good; there is a general air of civilization—which is none the worse for being pronouncedly French—in the town.

In the gardens attached to the waterworks, which pump 400,000 gallons per day of Nile water into Port Said, I was astonished to find a number of dear old friends—geraniums and jonquils in full bloom, a bed of violets, gilliflowers, mignonette, nasturtiums, roses, and many another English flower. The strawberries were nearly gone, though some fruit and blossoms still remained, and the last bunch of grapes had been cut a week before. We wiped our steaming foreheads on the (to us) piping hot January day, and examined the lettuces, cauliflowers, new potatoes, and green peas; then the courteous manager of the works took us to a little orange grove, and plucked the fragrant fruit for our refreshment. It is not every Eastern garden that possesses remembrances of home after this fashion; but the worthy French gentleman is blessed with an English wife, as the Turks and infidels of Ismailia are proud to tell you.

At Port Said there were no donkeys; at Ismailia all the well-known scenes of Cairo and Alexandria were repeated. A wall-eyed Arab boy thought to drive a good business by informing us that his animal was "the Claimant;" another beast was "Bismarck," and another "Ditchreally,"—the nearest rendering, apparently, that could be given by native tongues to Disraeli's name. Very few vessels, I should remark, halt in Lake Timsah more than an hour—no

Digitized by Google

longer, indeed, than to give the Ismailia pilot time to put off in his steam launch, and come on board to take charge from his colleague, who had assumed command at Port Said.

The Frenchman, even in the desert, is ever gay, and must have his little amusements. At Ismailia you may see him sitting under the trees to keep up his remembrances of the Champs Elysées by a temperate consumption of sugar-water, iced syrups, and syphon drinks. Of course we found an Irishman in Ismailia. Where do you not find one, especially if there be a French colony anywhere handy? He owned a splendid Arab horse that he intended to ride at the forthcoming races at Alexandria, but the animal had been ridden too hard from Jerusalem across the desert, and was in a sorry plight when his Egyptian groom led him out for his afternoon canter to the Viceroy's palace. In his fez, and from the fluent manner in which, as an officer of the telegraph bureau, the owner of the Arab steed conversed with Turks, Arabs, and niggers in their own tongues, I was puzzled to account for his nationality until I discovered by accident that he was a genuine son of green Erin. How out of place in those sandy Egyptian wastes looked the telegraphic wires and railway line!

At night we went the round of the places of public entertainment. They were all well-conducted and some of them really entertaining. In one concert hall we heard some capital music from an orchestra composed of young German girls, who discoursed most sweet strains from stringed, wind, and brass instruments, and who, by contrast with the women at the Café Chantant, looked the essence of homely simplicity, and prettiness withal. There was a little too much Wagner, perhaps, in the programme, but one could forgive that in a bevy of genuinely blonde-haired enthusiasts fresh from Fatherland.

Digitized by Google

The liveliest audience was at the Café Chantant, where there were a little ballet dancing of a free and easy character, and one of the most dismal comic singers that ever earned a living by public performances. The only comical thing I saw during the comic man's infliction was the blank astonishment of an English sailor who found he had to pay four shillings for a bottle of Bass's beer, and who uttered an exclamation so touching and so loud that the *soi-disant* disciple of Momus, beholding perchance a dangerous rival, looked stage daggers at him. There was a short *ballet d'action* very well done by three small boys and two fat young women, and the glasses on the tables were set ringing again by the boisterous applause of a party of officers from a French corvette lying in the lake.

A *bal masque* was going on somewhere, for we saw a procession of devils, monks, crusaders, and mummers frisk by just as a silent file of dromedaries laden with wood stalked in from the outlying desert. The two oddly-contrasted parties passed each other in the narrow thoroughfare, the dromedaries snorting viciously at the outrageous figures, of which we may be sure they had never dreamt in their philosophy.

"And doth not a meeting like this make amends?" soliloquized my companion. It did make amends, and we proceeded straightway to our boat.

After Lake Timsah the canal becomes a trifle more interesting. Tamarisks and less graceful shrubs are trying to grow around the ponds and lagoons flanking the southern corner, and there is quite a copse of the species of wild broom under which the prophet Elijah is said to have taken his repose in ages gone by. In the matter of shelter the prophet might certainly have done worse; and lo, as if to make the remembrance of the seer complete as we pass, a

Digitized by Google

few ravens, representatives of the Heaven-sent messengers who at another period of his life preserved him from starvation, rise noisily from a hillock and make in haste for the shores of the lake.

Bold scarified highlands appear rising steep out of the billows of eternal sand, and we are delighted with a placid lake fringed with nodding palms and other poetical trees. Alas! though the mountainous piles of sterility are real, the rest is nothing but mirage. Coarse grass, as we proceed, begins to grow by the deep, green water, and sometimes you may actually see straggling sheep and exiled goats browsing upon it. A dozen or so of white-robed Arabs and a string of camels move across the plain in single file, two of the men in advance carrying matchlocks that must have been taken out of some collection of singularly antique armour. Huts are more frequent; at one station a few women and children, all huddled together on the sand, cover their faces till we are out of sight.

The Bitter Lakes are forty leagues in circumference, allowing you the luxury of proceeding at full speed for a few miles. The water, as the name implies, is frightfully salt, almost as salt as that of the Mormon lake, which, I believe, yields one pail of salt to three pails of water. The canal water, also, is so impregnated that it leaves a white line of salt where it trickles, and, as every engineer who loves his boilers knows to his cost, encrusts everything it touches. Both the Bitter Lakes and Lake Timsah were mere sand basins until the canal was opened; they gave the excavators a good deal of trouble, and to this day require continual dredging. From the Bitter Lakes to Suez Bay the sand is as sandy as before; but tall cliffs and a ridge of rugged tableland that, as the hours wear on, receive a succession of umbers, browns, and greys from the sun, and in the evening display dark purple

Digitized by Google

tints of inconceivable beauty, add variety to the horizon line, until the Ottaka range becomes clearer and nearer, and the white houses of Suez, glittering in the sun, warn us that the desert lies behind us.

In leaving the canal I come back to my previous conclusions—first, that there will not be many travellers eager to deny that a little of the canal is enough; and, second that the widening of the channel is the chief question for the consideration of the shareholders. Probably it will be urged that the game is not worth the candle; for to make any improvement scheme final or effective the present width of 72 feet of deep water must be at least doubled, and that would be indeed a costly and troublesome, though not perhaps in these days of scientific triumph, and with no lack of labourers at hand, difficult business.

The proverb mentions a certain unmentionable person as not so bad as he is painted. I will mention the Red Sea—speaking of seas as I found them—in that conjunction. That it was the cool season in those regions I knew, but I had been led to expect a gradual frying even in January. The temperature, in fact, was extremely enjoyable, as it had been in the main from the time of our entrance into the Mediterranean; it was not till we were much nearer the equator than the outlet to the Red Sea that we began to know what heat really meant.

The scenery on either side of the Gulf of Suez is very wild, and at times romantically sterile. One side was as bad (or as good) as the other. It may be, as I have somewhere read, that the Peninsula of Sinai is geographically, geologically, and archæologically one of the most interesting places in the world, but it is not a whit the more attractive to the general traveller for those intrinsic merits. If the Arabian side was not more fertile in the early days of the world than

Digitized by Google

it is now the Israelites did not gain much by their flight from the flesh-pots of Pharaoh.

The lofty hills skirting the tableland of the interior may be, and some of them are, grand in their outline, but it cannot be forgotten that they stand direction posts to the Wilderness of the Wanderings. The sides of the hills and rocks appear to have been calcined by a terrible convulsion, and in places to have been seared as with a hot iron. The occasional glimpses of Arabia and Nubia as you pass down the Red Sea are of the same hard, burnt, treeless character, and the only attractiveness lies in the fantastic forms of the granite peaks and spurs. These, looked at with the most interesting historical associations as motive power, are of course not to be neglected, but the observer who had recently been reading highly-coloured accounts of what the Prince of Wales was to wonder at in his passage through the Red Sea would not obtain the superb views he had been led to expect.

Digitized by Google

THIRD ENTRY.

FLYING FISH AND THEIR ENEMIES.

THE flying fish seems to prefer wind, and is particularly merry when the sea is agitated by a six-knot breeze. Perhaps it would be more correct to say that the larger fish which prey upon it are very much on the alert on such occasions, even as the pike of the fresh waters at home make more frequent demand upon the fisherman's energies in rough than in calm weather. The fact remains, on the evidence of my own observations renewed every day for a fortnight, and on that of the seafaring people on board, who must be excellent authorities on the subject, that the flying fish appear in greater number and friskiness on moderately rough days.

The movements of the flying fish are as graceful as a swallow's, and the creature is a much more shapely object than I had been led to expect from pictures, written descriptions, or the few preserved specimens I had seen. The stuffed affair at the British Museum, like all the other representations of the fish world there, is, of course, an outrage on Nature. The wings, large in comparison with the body,

Digitized by Google

which may be compared roughly, in shape and size, to a Christchurch mackerel (a small, sweet-eating description much prized on the Hampshire coast), are, as we saw them in flight, outspread at right-angles, and underneath you might at times catch sight of the second set of smaller wing-fins, which are thought to have more to do with the actual flight than the others. The upper wings (we may so term them for convenience) were a dark brown in some, a reddish brown in others, beautifully speckled in many, while the tiniest varieties displayed brown fringes to wings which differed but slightly from the grey-coloured back. The twinkle of these singular membranes as the sun caught them was a very beautiful sight.

No less beautiful was the method of flight. I am aware that some naturalists deny that the flying fish flies at all, deny that it flaps its wing-fins, deny or doubt that it has the power of changing its course. If rising five or six feet out of the water, skimming now up, now down, wheeling first to the right and then to the left, and sustaining these movements for a distance of a hundred yards or more, do not constitute flying, there is no meaning in words. The fish did all this unmistakably, and in their flight they repeatedly turned over slightly on one side until the silvery white of their bellies flashed again. Their sweep from the trough of the sea, parallel with the side and over the summit of the billows, forcibly reminded one of the joyous return of a martin to the household eaves. Sometimes two or three fishes would be in company; sometimes a numerous shoal would get up from close under the ship's bows, scattering like a covey of partridges, and with a patter-patter that recalled the wild fowl roused from their reedy retreat by the margin of some inland lake. They were probably frightened by the approach of the noisy steamer, and dispersed beyond what is usual when

Digitized by Google

their motions are regulated by hungry pursuers swimming in the rear. On such emergencies the shoal keeps well together. I noticed that the "flights" consisted generally of fish of uniform size, and not of an admixture of great and small.

The most numerous shoals were of fish that could not have been over six inches long, and this I take to be the average dimensions of the species. Perhaps not more than a dozen individuals of the multitudes I watched without tiring in the Indian Ocean were a foot in length, and the people on board were unanimous in saying that fourteen inches is an extreme size. The majority of the fish reminded one of the swallow tribe as much from their bulk as from their rapid airy flights. At fifty yards' distance a flying shoal might be likened to a handful of half-crowns hurled into the air by some submerged distributor of largess; should the ship come unexpectedly into the very thick of the gathering they would disperse on either hand with a flutter that might go far to excuse the alarm of "Breakers under the bow."

The theory that the large pectoral fins, or wings, do not actually flap may, after all, be well grounded. The doctor of the ship and myself resolved ourselves into a committtee of investigation to decide this point, and leaning over the bow we loyally performed our duties for the space of an hour, during which hundreds of flying fish of all sorts and sizes passed under our review, and frequently at such close quarters that we could clearly mark the shape of their large round eye. Notwithstanding these favourable opportunities we could not agree in the result. The fish were here now, and the next moment gone like a gleam, touching the top of a wave perhaps fifty yards off, and away again with undiminished rapidity. I was certainly at first rather inclined to the non-flapping theory as far as the major wing-fins are

Digitized by Google

concerned, but not with respect to the lesser pair underneath. But afterwards I formed a decided opinion that the creature begins its career by a rapid motion of the wing-fins, and that, having acquired the requisite momentum, it keeps them fixed and outstretched until it touches water once more. The following I quote as a technical description of the flying fish's *modus operandi*:—

"The principal external agents employed in this mode of locomotion are the large lobe of the tail-fin and the broad transparent pectoral fins, which on this occasion serve at least as a parachute, and which, being situated close to the back, place the centre of suspension higher than the centre of gravity. It is also curious to notice how well the specific gravity of the fish can be regulated in correspondence with the element through which it may move. The swim bladder, when perfectly distended, occupies nearly the entire cavity of the abdomen, and contains a large quantity of air; and in addition to this there is a membrane in the mouth which can be inflated through the gills; these two reservoirs of air affording good substitutes for the air cells so freely distributed within the bones of birds, and having the additional advantage of being voluntary in their function."

Whether the occasional dipping of the fish into the sea as it flies is an absolute necessity to further progress is also an open question, but it would seem reasonable to suppose that the delicate wing-fins outspread in the sun and wind would soon become dry, and, like the throat of the orator, require occasional moistening. The fish does dip, and pretty often too, but, it struck me sometimes, not because there was pressing occasion for it so much as because the ridge of the billow afforded a passing temptation. Neither could it have been for purposes of rest after exhaustion, since there was no pause; the fish on the wing simply brushed

Digitized by Google

through the water without perceptibly "slowing" the mysterious engine power with which it has been invested.

Very earnestly did everybody wish to welcome a few flying fish to the deck. The mouths of those passengers to whom the morning and evening publications of the ship—to wit, the neatly got-up breakfast and dinner *menus*—were all important as official gazettes, remembered that there had been no fresh fish for many days, and the officers and stewards drove them frantic by repeating at every meal their descriptions of the luscious morsel. It was little short of mockery to tell us that the cook—and a capital cook that yellow-bearded Frenchman was—had a special gift in the browning of flying fish, and that, to a well-regulated human being who was not hypocrite enough to affect contempt of good living, nothing more delicately succulent, more exquisitely flavoured, could be offered.

Was it only to tantalize that the chief officer told us how last year, in the same latitude and almost the same longitude, the deck one morning was covered with welcome fish, which had taken a flight, alas! in the dark, from which there was no return? If so, the second officer was in the plot, for he supplemented his superior's experiences with his own; the effect of his asseverations being that many a time and oft he had hung lanterns over the bulwarks and attracted the fish to their doom—a cause and effect in which the sailor places unhesitating belief, though I suspect there is about as much ground for the notion as there was for the statement of the ancients that the flying fish invariably flew ashore every night to escape its manifold enemies at sea.

The flying fish undoubtedly does fly on board ships when lanterns are suspended from the chains; but, then, just as often it is found on deck when no such reputed lure has been exhibited. However, that not at all uncommon cir-

Digitized by Google

cumstance of dead flying fish being found on a vessel's deck at daybreak did not happen to us. This was a matter of special regret to me. I do not deny that I should have been very glad of so agreeable an addition to the pleasures of the table, but that there was a higher motive than that I would fain protest.

Years ago, I remembered, the Rev. Mr. Wood, in his "Popular Natural History," pointed out that the climbing perch and other fish of similar habits possessed certain reservoirs of water which oxygenized the blood, but that such a provision was not found in the flying fish. Mr. Wood upon this asked whether the fish might not be wrought into a temporary intoxication through the excess of oxygen caused by its passage through the air, and he suggested that it would be an interesting experiment to test the temperature of the blood of a newly-caught flying fish, and mark the length of time it would live out of water.

Those experiments may have been made long ago, but in the absence of any knowledge to that effect I had determined, if ever the chance came in my way, to distinguish myself in the cause of science, and perhaps give to the world a new and wondrous locomotive power that should far surpass steam, electricity, or ballooning. It was not to be; the instrument was ready for thrusting into the fish's mouth, or under its pectoral fin, the instrumentalist was both willing and anxious to find out the precise temperature; the drawback was fatal: we could not secure a single subject.

The mariner will tell you that deep-sea fishes as a rule are dry and tasteless, and that the flying fish, which, in spite of its occasional trips into the upper air, must rank as one of the class, is the one delightful exception. It is likely that a similar opinion is entertained by three, if not more, predatory inhabitants of the seas—namely, the dolphin, bonito,

Digitized by Google

and albacore. The poor little flying fish is their tit-bit. They hunt it remorselessly, apparently enjoying the sport of pursuit as keenly as the ultimate capture and final scrunch of its tender bones.

The popular estimation of the animal creation is, as we know in such examples as the lion, camel, goose, owl, hare, and the like, founded more upon imagination than upon observation. The dolphin must be included in the list of these overrated, underrated, or perhaps altogether unworthy, idols. He has been made the subject of the painter's art, who, for some inscrutable reason or other, has given him a curl in the tail which Nature never dreamt of. Poets have had a turn at him. Thus :—

> "Kind, gen'rous dolphins love the rocky shore,
> Where broken waves with fruitless anger roar ;
> But though to sounding shores they curious come,
> Yet dolphins count the boundless sea their home.
> Nay, should these favourites forsake the main,
> Neptune would grieve his melancholy reign.
> The calmest, stillest seas, when left by them
> Would awful frown and all unjoyous seem ;
> But when the darling frisks his wanton play
> The waters smile and every wave looks gay."

And that warm, wicked syren Cleopatra, wishing to say the very highest thing that could be said of her lord, the hapless Marcus Antonius, observed that his delights were dolphin-like. In the olden time the dolphin was believed to be in moral nature quite a model fish. He was lauded as the possessor of a big, philanthropic soul, as a fond lover of the human race and notably of the weak, helpless, and young. Instances, with every circumstantiality of detail, were given of boys riding to school on a dolphin's back, and of distressed seamen rescued from peril by the eager

Digitized by Google

dolphin, who volunteered to convey them in safety to the shore. It would be highly interesting to hear what the flying fish had to say touching this Shaftesbury of the shoals —this scaly pattern of piscatorial piety.

One dark night, far out in the Indian Ocean, we were treated to a series of highly effective illuminations. It seemed as if all the finest stars in the firmament had fallen down into the sea, and, after sinking somewhat, had been arrested in their descent by an under-current which took them in slow procession past us. We could see them luminously pale half a fathom beneath the surface, floating solemnly on in never-ending numbers. The larger lights—the planets, so to speak—shone gloriously when not too much submerged; the ordinary constellations glowed in meeker but not less enchanting measure. These were Medusæ—if the metaphor must be dropped—and the ocean was full of them. By-and-by the vessel steamed through what I presume must have been a dense field of spawn; dazzling cascades of silver were cast off from her sides, and for a few minutes we were ploughing through a lake of living fire.

This peculiar condition of the water revealed to us something of the dolphin's philanthropic quality. Abreast of the ship, and not far removed from the weather bow, a shoal of small fish could be descried scudding along after the manner of foam. At first it was believed to be foam, but a moment's reflection showed that the white mass would in that case be moving in an opposite direction. Further watching convinced us it was a shoal of flying fish. Soon there was a racket below and a pyrotechnic discharge: the fish had broken cover and flown out of the sea. After a short flight they settled again, and then I understood the secret. A couple of long luminous bars appeared in rear of the shoal—dol-

Digitized by Google

phins, beyond a doubt, hotly chasing their prey. They do not often venture so near a steamship as this, but at this moment they were reckless—angry, maybe, that the flying fish should still keep out of their clutches. The dolphins raced mostly neck and neck, but the outer one sometimes sheered off and increased the distance between him and the ship. As the flying fish rushed out of the sea the dolphins would put on a spurt, and literally side by side shoot ahead with the evident intention of catching the quarry as it touched water. So they disappeared—the dolphins very confident; the flying fish wary, but alarmed. It was an exciting race, for the odds were not by any means even.

The brilliant-coloured fish which is always called dolphin, but which is, accurately speaking, the coryphene, knows the difference between a steamer and a sailing ship, and is therefore rarely to be seen in the vicinity of the former. The noise of propeller and paddle is, indeed, most effective in frightening the monsters of the deep, and this, coupled with the great speed at which steam vessels travel, robs the steamboat passenger of the enjoyment which falls to the lot of those who go down to the sea in canvas-propelled ships. At a moderate speed, say from four to six knots an hour, dolphin, bonito, and albacore may be taken, either by harpooning from the bowsprit or the chains underneath, or by trailing white and red rag, or any other rude imitation of the flying fish, from the stern.

In the Red Sea I attempted something with two tassels of crimson and white wool, but as the ship was making eleven knots an hour the experiment was a miserable failure. No fish was likely to have been so befooled, and if one had been hooked, I must have hauled its head from its shoulders before I could have brought it to the ship. In the Gulf of Aden three or four bonitos leaped out of the sea a little

Digitized by Google

astern, affording us a fair view of their kind. They were handsome fellows, about two feet long, with roundish body and mottled blue back—in short, an overgrown mackerel. Indulging in useless regrets never pays; for all which I should not have bemoaned the fate that had given me a few hours amongst the bonito in a nice little sprit-sail boat, with a certain whiffling apparatus twirling along the wake.

Before setting forth on my long voyage, I received from a very clever friend a letter, in which this sentence occurred: "Do not omit to slay the regulation shark with the silver watch and seals and the partially-digested pair of boots in his interior, and do not try to investigate his mysteries until you have divided the spinal narrow just above the tail, *secundum artem*, with an axe, while Neptune and Amphitrite, and all the rest of them, are holding high jinks at the equator."

Now, it so happened that on the afternoon which introduced us to the bonitos, and not far from the spot whence they had leaped, after the manner of roach eluding the grab of Master Jack, an innocent bit of fan-shaped leather, as it would appear, protruded from the water. Strange to say, it veered round and began to sail leisurely off in the wind's eye. It was a rascally white shark; and even he did not fancy the noise of our revolving screw, though plainly on the war-path in general, with a design in particular upon the bonito.

So runs the world, my masters—shark eats bonito, bonito eats flying fish, flying fish eats other fry, and other fry eats something else.

One of the officers had in his cabin a walking-stick, of which he was very proud—a richly-mounted and highly-polished staff, that had once "officiated" as the spine of a great shark.

Digitized by Google

The history of this officer's walking-stick, as told to me, was in this wise: Cat in saloon falls sick, becomes useless, and is voted a nuisance. Boatswain, according to orders, heaves Tabby overboard about seven bells in the dog watch, which, as everybody should know, is half-past seven o'clock. First-class passenger jokes because cat is drowned in dog watch, and cat is thereafter forgotten. Shark is caught next morning on hook baited with three pounds four ounces of pork; hideous beast is boused up, and slain in the customary manner with axe. Shark being opened, cat is found in the interior; that it is the defunct Tabby is patent to the meanest understanding. This may be considered by some persons a mere long-bow shot; for myself, I firmly believe the story. The man who told it me, and who assisted in the capture, was incapable of romancing over such a matter.

The passing view we obtained of the southern extremity of Ceylon was a grateful break in the monotony of the Indian Ocean and Bay of Bengal, and it was hailed with delight, not only because it was land seen after many days of sea and sky, but because it presented the first grateful foliage (with the exception of the gardens of Ismailia) we had seen since leaving England. A few catamarans came off as a matter of course, but as they had no fruit on board we treated them with true British contempt. The cocoa nut palms are drawn up in line all along the shore, and the entire island, mountain and lowland alike, appears profusely wooded. The harbour of Point de Galle is surrounded by leafy groves, and to us, passing two miles out at sea, its avenues and plantations, with cool habitations peeping above the plaintains and palms, smiled like a Land of Promise.

Equally bright, by contrast with the brown granite ranges of Africa, the desert expanses of the Isthmus of Suez, and the hopeless sterility of the land bordering the Red Sea,

Digitized by Google

were the beautiful islands and islets of the Straits of Malacca. In these latitudes one of the sailors caught a booby bird. As the sun sank rose-red over the island of Sumatra vivid lightning began to play on the western horizon, and as we watched the distant storm a dark form swept along the bulwarks and silently vanished. In the brief twilight, which in these low latitudes comes and departs without ceremony, this mysterious apparition attracted considerable notice. A young person given to sentiment suggested that it was the Spirit of the Tempest hovering over us to warn us of impending doom. Whatever it might be, it seemed to have a decided *penchant* for hovering; it hovered sometimes within a few feet of us, mournfully flapping its long wings; after an absence of a few minutes, or moments as the case may be, it would return, as though unable to overcome the doubt it entertained of our honesty, or to resist the temptation of keeping near the ship.

Soon there was a shout forward, succeeded by a speedy solution of the matter. The mysterious Spirit of the Tempest was a booby bird; it had been taken prisoner, and was now being brought aft a miserable captive. It had fluttered around the steamer until the coloured lights were being put in their accustomed niches, and then the stupid bird, as if it were a moth and the green lantern a candle, clumsily alighted on the head of the man who had affixed the lamp. It reminded me of the gannets of Bass's Rock, but was smaller; although its body did not weigh a pound, its wings outstretched measured more than four feet. We tried the silly creature by judge and jury, tying its wings as a temporary precaution, and allowing it to flap about as best it might on the deck. The balance of evidence tended to show that the booby most righteously deserves its name, that it foolishly courts attacks that another bird would avoid, and that

Digitized by Google

it would be useless to us either for food or preservation. The sentence therefore was that the captive booby should be set at liberty. Its bonds were accordingly unfastened, and its long dark wings began to bang the deck while its outstretched head, terminated by a formidable beak four inches long, invested it with dangerous propensities in the eyes of the ladies. The booby, like the albatross, is unable to rise from the deck of its own accord; our released prisoner was therefore treated to a friendly heave by the deck officer—an act of kindness which it repaid by a vicious parting tweak from its bill.

Digitized by Google

FOURTH ENTRY.

THE STRAITS OF MALACCA.

"Sometimes we see a cloud that's dragonish;
A vapour sometimes like a bear or lion.
A tower'd citadel, a pendent rock,
A forked mountain or blue promontory
With trees upon't that nod unto the world,
And mock our eyes with air."

ON board ship one does not feel inclined to work hard. The motion of the vessel, the insufficient lights below, or the liberties taken by the wind with your papers on deck, tempt you with all manner of excuses. Before commencing your voyage you have puffed yourself up with commendable resolutions, and cumbered your baggage with formidable materials for hard work. Every traveller, I believe, does the same; and every traveller, I believe, ends by abandoning himself to unblushing indolence. For a few days you play at hide-and-seek with conscience, and in the end, persuading yourself that the heat or cold is fatal to mental exertion, lock up your papers, and take out old book acquaintances, to renew former loves and hold sweet counsel with tried friends. In the tropical seas Shakespeare

Digitized by Google

proved a most admirable deck companion, and every day at sunset the picture which opens this entry in "My Ocean Log" was hung up in Nature's artistically-lighted picture gallery.

The sunsets were quite indescribable. All too brief as they were in duration, they combined colours that no painter could imitate without being condemned as a wild dreamer. After the usual golden proclamation of approaching departure, the sun would swiftly descend into the depths, and then would begin flushes and blushes of the most delicate carmine, rose, orange, blood red, purple, and violet, tinging the fantastic shapes assumed by the clouds according to the condition of the atmosphere. The dinner bell would generally ring as we watched in silence the glorious scene, but few stirred from the deck until the final fold of the curtain of dusk had fallen. Those who had lost loved ones thought of them, associating with the spectacle the idea that the angel world must lie somewhere beyond such radiant portals. The seriously-inclined involuntarily remembered the description of the city whose walls were of jasper, whose foundations were garnished with all manner of precious stones, whose gates were pearls, and whose streets were pure gold, as if it were transparent glass—a description, however, prefaced by the significant statement "and there was no more sea." On sea as on land, no doubt it is a beautiful world.

When we have crossed the Bay of Bengal, blue as indigo, and a good deal ruffled by the change of monsoons, we must look more closely to our courses, for upon entering the Straits of Malacca we naturally feel that another phase of the voyage opens.

From the captain of a Dutch troopship lying at Singapore, on her way from Acheen to Batavia, it was possible to obtain reply to a question which we had a couple of days

Digitized by Google

previously asked each other on passing Acheen Head, as to whether upon those beautiful highlands, so welcome to the sight after the monotony of ocean travel, the wearying war of races was still going on.

"Yes, we are fighting still," the Dutch officer said to me, "and there seems no more prospect of a termination to the campaign than there was three years ago."

On the deck, within a few yards of the bridge upon which we were standing, a Javanese lay dying; around him were other natives (soldiers and coolies), half-naked skeletons shocking to behold, stretched helpless upon the planks, gasping out the last few breathings that would convulse their spectral frames. The more fortunate took no notice of their wretched comrades, whose bodies by this time have feasted the sharks swarming in the Straits. The Malay, like the stoical Chinaman, is not frighted at death, for the sufficient reason that he takes no notice of it. By the side of an emaciated man, who actually died before I left the ship, sat a woman; and whether wife or mere companion, it must to her credit be said that, though not apparently in any mental distress, she patiently tended him, putting morsels of banana between his fevered lips. The ribs protruded through the mahogany skin, the black eyes rolled in mortal agony, but he munched on at the juicy fruit, and so munching, died.

It was a common occurrence apparently on board that ship, for it was taken by everybody as a matter of course. The blue-eyed Dutch sailors, gaunt and yellow, and each—for so the rules of the Dutch service in the East allow—accompanied through the wars by a native female companion, though delighted at the prospect of rest after the campaign, were but shadows of their former selves; their spirit had departed, their shabby blue clothes—it were an outrage to call them uniforms—hung loosely about them,

Digitized by Google

and their hungry gaze wandered over the pine apple gardens and cocoa nut groves of the island opposite, as if Paradise itself lay beneath the bright green foliage and bowers deeply shaded by tropical vegetation. Those heaps of matting on the foredeck covered dead men; the eight natives on the main deck were rebel prisoners, very jolly indeed with their games and laughter, though knowing well enough that their brief hours were numbered. The flat-faced Javanese women cumbering the ship laughed and chatted and strolled with their miserable white owners; the Chinese and Hindoo hawkers displayed their wares; the business of the vessel went on briskly; and on the bare decks, wherever you turned, the haggard victims of jungle fever and dysentery lay silently staring into space.

This, I fear, is not a cheerful beginning for a description of the Straits of Malacca, but it is a natural one. Here we had proof that the fairy scenes which had greeted our eyes on entering those lovely waters are fatal to the Europeans fighting against fearful odds to subdue the Acheenese in their jungle fastnesses. The country is fair to the passing eye, but pestilence is the real enemy against which the Hollanders have to contend, and against which no weapon yet discovered can prevail. The war, therefore, still drags its slow length along. Sometimes another stockade is carried, and the general's despatches give three or four more of the foe killed or wounded. Meanwhile regular relays of soldiers arrive from Batavia to replace worn-out detachments such as those of whom we had specimens on board the troopship.

The Dutchmen shrug their shoulders and are content. It is certain enough that if they had at the outset (four years ago) wedded a liberal expenditure of money to energetic action in the field, the Acheenese would have been at once brought to their senses. Just what we did in the Ashantee bush

Digitized by Google

should have been the policy adopted in the Acheen jungle. Mountain guns? Rockets? Roads? Yes, these should have been employed, certainly. The Dutchman admits it; but, as I have said, shrugs his shoulders and is content. For ten years the Dutch have been engaged in similar trifling in Celebes, and now the fourth commander-in-chief was expected in Acheen to fill up the place made vacant by the sudden death, after a successful advance, of General Pell.

From the deck of our steamer on entering the Straits of Malacca you spy out the tall white lighthouse on Acheen Head. This portion of the great island of Sumatra, nevertheless, looks peaceful and smiling. Here, verily, must be the "green islands of glittering seas" which, in the fascinating verse of Mrs. Hemans, enchained the wondering thoughts of our childhood. Islands clothed in verdure to their lofty crowns, and islets set like gems in the emerald waters, break the endless expanse of sea and sky of which, through day and night, you have been the solitary centre. Close to the water's edge the straight bare trunks of the graceful betel palm stand in serried array; behind them virgin forest, repository of unnumbered natural wonders peculiar to this part of the world, rises to join hands with the lower clouds. Tiny islets—mere hillocks of coral above the watery plain—you may notice, too small to bear a plantation, but not barren enough to reject the solitary cocoa nut palm whose plume nods high above. The sea is untroubled and glassy, and the fleecy clouds, "white as carded wool," hover with gentle wings over the land.

Not soon will you forget that charming passage down the Straits of Malacca. Dim in the distance you can make out the Sumatra Mountains; they are quite worthy of that name, since one of the peaks reaches the brevet rank of 15,000 feet. Golden Mount, a landmark seen, it is said, under

Digitized by Google

favourable conditions of atmosphere, ninety miles off, is another conspicuous object, and our eyes rest lovingly and fondly upon beautiful Water Island, rising sheer out of the sea, and presenting all the variety of colour and form of which gorgeous foliage is capable. The greatest breadth from land to land in the Straits of Malacca is 160 miles, and the narrowest about twenty. During the monsoon, which blows from November to May, you have thus over 500 miles of exquisite voyaging, perpetual glimpses of tropic-land, an enjoyable temperature, and a prevalence of zephyrs rather than breezes.

One remembers how people at home laughed when the importance of the Straits of Malacca was advanced by Mr. Disraeli as a paramount national consideration. But after making personal acquaintance with this great highway to the East, one somehow moderates one's mirth, and the conviction grows that our possessions upon the Malacca side of the Straits are of immense consequence to us. It so happened that, giving the island of Penang a wide berth, we missed a view of one of our most delightful settlements. With Malacca we fared better. This rare old town, once the trading emporium of the Archipelago, was concealed behind the gauzy curtains of early morning, but as we neared it the hastening sun came up in all his majesty. The sudden beams, like willing fingers, seemed to search for and promptly loosen the strings confining the vapoury veil, and in succession there appeared the white houses, the bungalows amidst the rich foliage, the barracks, stadt-house, and other prominent buildings; the bold hill of St. Paul's with its remnants of the old Portuguese fort, and the ruins of the church, erected in a bygone era by the conqueror Albuquerque, to be the scene of the heroic labours and reputed miracles of St. Xavier.

Digitized by Google

If a photographer, on an expedition round the world, should ever pass this way, let him take a view of Malacca from the roadstead. The town lies in a crescent-shaped bay, with a grand background of hills and mountains, terminated towards the south by Mount Ophir, a lofty triple-peaked mountain famous for its gold mines, and sometimes, though wrongly, confounded with the Ophir which the Old Testament associates with the riches of the East.

The Straits contain numberless islands: some of them the haunts of pirates; others the basking grounds of turtle. The latter afford the natives—who take very kindly indeed to the trade of fisherman—a source of revenue, and I can answer for the excellence of the creatures captured. There are worse things in the world than turtle cutlet, fin, and soup. As to the pirates, they still find the means, when they dare, of picking up a dishonest livelihood, but their comb is being cut to the smallest dimensions. We have several gunboats upon the coast, and the Malays have long ago learned that the little craft bite as well as bark. Formerly the Straits swarmed with murderous sea-robbers, who lay hidden behind the headlands watching for the becalmed trader caught in the doldrums. The gallant mariners might resist valorously to the death, but they would be overpowered by numbers and barbarously despatched.

The modern steamship has, amongst other benefits conferred upon mankind, ruined the ancient Malay business of murder and piracy. The pirates, nevertheless, retain their old characteristics. Nothing but the unceasing vigilance and determination of the English gunboats and law administrators on shore holds them in check. They prey upon any small craft that unwarily falls into their clutches, and the mariner's hand-books of the Archipelago contain frequent paragraphs that conclude with warnings to boating parties

Digitized by Google

landing at certain islands for water or provisions. By this time the Straits have been very fairly surveyed. In the infancy of hydrography the East India Company did excellent service in this respect, and the Dutch navigators have ably assisted in the production of a good chart of the reef and island-bestudded seas.

The beauties of the Straits of Malacca grow upon you as you reach their southern terminal at Singapore, which, since the days when Malacca, the oldest European settlement in the far East, declined from its ancient prestige, has become not only the seat of Government in this quarter of the world, but the metropolis of general commerce. Through Penang come the sugar grown in the province of Wellesley (about 140 miles of coast country opposite the island) and the fruits of Penang itself. Malacca, too, has not entirely retired from business, but lives on in hopes that the development of the mineral resources of the interier of the peninsula will by-and-by give it a new lift in the world. But Singapore is at present master of the situation, and Singapore must on this account, and because of its peculiar attractions, be one of the calling places which will most delight the traveller who is bound to China, or who selects the short and diversified sea route (the Eastern and Australian Company's line) to Australia through Torres Straits.

The island of Singapore is covered with small hills wooded, as is the fashion in these seas, on summit, slope, and plain. The European residents have naturally taken advantage of these airy coigns of vantage, and it is their cool bungalows which, while we cluster on the poop, with eyes fixed upon land, we discuss admiringly, and not without some envy, as the engine slows, and finally stops till the pilot arrives. There are the airy verandahs, the sleek broad leaves of the tropical trees and shrubs, which are in the old country

Digitized by Google

with difficulty introduced as curiosities into rare palm houses; and the residents, in cool white garments, take measure of us from under their umbrellas. In latitudes where the sun has equatorial power there is a wonderful clearness of perspective, and withal a dreamy look about air, earth, and sky, that suggests *siesta*, and makes indolence—a sin and a shame at home—both a virtue and a necessity.

When the pilot mounts the bridge, and the propeller churns the green water once more into milky foam, we steamed slowly through a narrow channel, past clustering islands of spices, cocoa nuts, pine apples, and bananas, out into the spacious roadstead, where ships of every nation, not excluding the towering Chinese junk, rock lazily at anchor; and so by a broad backward sweep abreast of the distant town we arrive at the wharf, where the European officials and natives in all their oriental strangeness of costume, or no costume worth mentioning, await us. Before the gangway can be shipped the sun has streamed over the islets opposite, suffusing them with a final outpouring of gold, purple, and rose colour; then the king of day suddenly leaves them and us to a twilight that in brevity, as in scenic effects, is a dissolving view of amazing splendour.

In the *Himalaya* troopship lying at the Tanjong wharf at Singapore, I recognized the vessel in which I once made passage on a journalistic expedition, and I was not long in renewing my acquaintance with her gallant captain. She was waiting for one of our regiments that had been settling our little difficulty at Perak; and to this extent she resembled the Batavian vessel that had brought warriors from Acheen. There, however, the resemblance ended. Need I say that the *Himalaya* was "alow and aloft" precisely what every English navy ship is wherever you may find her —a pattern of order and efficiency? Nor need I apologize

Digitized by Google

for observing that when, next day, I stood upon the littered and lumbered and repulsive decks of the Dutch troopship, I remembered with pride the perfect discipline, sweet air, and irreproachable cleanliness of our own transport.

Digitized by Google

FIFTH ENTRY.

AT SINGAPORE.

THERE is no place, perhaps, in the far East which has received greater immediate advantages from the Suez Canal than Singapore. Most of the vessels which pass Port Said without increasing its trade by so much as the value of half a dollar, halt at this curious capital of the Straits Settlements. It is the half-way house between England and China on the one hand, and Australasia on the other. At the beginning of the present century it was a collection of Malay fishermen's huts. Even Sir Stamford Raffles, through whose forethought the island became part of the British possessions in 1819, could never have dreamt of the great commercial importance it would some day obtain. A convenience it was from the first; now it is a necessity. Fine docks have been built out of a humid swamp by the Tanjong Paggar Dock Company, near the western entrance of the roadstead, where the handful of savage fishermen have grown into a thriving population of over 26,000 persons, who are enjoying the advantages of European trade and English rule, and who, though chiefly natives to the manner born,

Digitized by Google

are content and happy because well governed and prosperous. And there is no town in the far East which affords the traveller a better insight into certain phases of oriental life.

At Point-de-Galle you are delighted with the Eastern scenery and Eastern humanity, but it is Eastern humanity with a prevailing flavour of India. At Singapore you have the Malayan races at home, with all their national characteristics, and not as at Malacca, so mingled with the Dutch and Portuguese that it is difficult to tell where Europe begins and Asia ends; the Chinese quarters are as much Chinese as streets in Hongkong or Canton; and in smaller proportions, the singular diversity of races is increased by the Kling from Madras, the slender Bengali, the Parsee, the Chittie, the Armenian Jew, and the Arab.

An Englishman fresh from home will be surprised at the busy appearance of the docks. Chinese carpenters and blacksmiths are hammering and sawing in the sheds, using tools as primitive as those which, as Holman Hunt's famous picture shows, stood upon Joseph the Carpenter's bench eighteen hundred years ago. Nothing can induce these remarkable people to adopt modern inventions. They do their work well, but it must be in their own way, and at their own slow speed. The better class of Chinese artisans you may distinguish by the light clothing which they permit themselves to wear. The majority of the Chinese and Malays about the docks, like their compatriots up in the town, are content with a wisp of cloth fastened round the loins, to hang more or less (generally considerably less) to the knees. To be sure, you have on your outward voyage, beginning at Port Said, become accustomed to these trifles, and by the time you have travelled far enough to be able to look about you in the Singapore docks, you regard any

Digitized by Google

clothing exceeding in dimensions an ordinary handkerchief, as a reckless and surprising extravagance in "the lower orders."

It seems, after all, tolerably possible to get along without beef and beer. Strong and lissom are some of these rice and fish-fed fellows; tall, straight, and displaying good muscles. That this semblance of strength and condition is not delusive you may perceive by the amount of work the Chinese or Malay coolies get through, and the weights they carry. As a rule, it takes several orientals to accomplish one Englishman's labour, but this is a rule not without a wide margin of exception. Speaking of men as they find them, the European employers give the native mechanics and the copper-skinned hewers of wood and drawers of water an excellent character; indeed, you will often be not a little pained to hear English employers speak better of them than of the British workman, who is taught to pity his dusky heathen brother bowing down to blocks of wood and stone. However, I wish to draw a picture, not to moralize. So we will leave the docks and the workmen there, many-tinted, from the sickly yellow of the fair Chinaman with his shaven pate and everlasting pigtail, down through every shade of brown until you come to the sable Bengali with his glossy black ringlets.

Before starting for the town, a mile and a half off, you may turn into the bungalow, liberally provided for English and American seamen and passengers. It is a reading-room, and travellers in a thirsty land scarcely welcome water with greater eagerness than that with which we, who had not seen an English newspaper for six weeks, charge at the files of *The Daily News*, *Punch*, *Fun*, the illustrated journals, and one or two of the cheaper magazines. The gharries, driven generally by Bengali boys under strict Scotland-yardlike

Digitized by Google

regulations, are drawn by capital ponies; they are Singapore specialities, born and bred in Sumatra and in certain portions of the Malay peninsula, and though diminutive they are perfectly shaped, safe, swift trotters, and hardy. As to colour they run a good deal to piebald; and they are most kindly treated by their owners.

Along the Tanjong Paggar Road you continually meet rude carts, heavily laden with merchandise—gambier and pepper, hides, or fancy woods from the interior, where the irrepressible Chinaman is gardener, woodman and all else that is remunerative. To the carts are yoked hump-shouldered bulls, sleek-hided as a deer, mostly fawn-coloured, and as docile as the lamb. Fan palms, bananas, cocoa nut and betel palms, tree ferns, bamboos, rattans, tropical creepers and flowers, and vistas of strange and beautiful trees appear on either side of the well-kept road. Next you pass through a native street, probably holding your nose until you become acclimatized to the indescribable stenches of the native quarters. There are "rows" on either side of the thoroughfare, very different from the picturesque covered ways of ancient Chester or the continental towns, but affording shelter from the sun for the inhabitants, who have a wonderful love of squatting on their hams outside their small primitive places of business; squatting in company; squatting in silence; squatting morning, noon, and night.

There are miles of streets in Singapore, but in every one of them the natives shall be found perseveringly engaged in this absorbing do-nothing occupation. Longfellow would be charmed with the perfect way in which they have learned, if not to labour, at least to wait. John Chinaman, of course, is everywhere. The little bazaars with the hieroglyphs over the door, the lanterns suspended from the ceiling inside, the idol over the candle-lit shrine, and the curtained-off inner

Digitized by Google

apartment; the licensed opium shops; the places of the tailors, butchers, and bakers—these all mark the whereabouts of the Chinaman. In the heart of the town the countless shops (all open to the street) admirably illustrate the industrious character of the Chinese artisan; illustrate also the teeming numbers of the race, their sobriety, their quietness, their skill. A blacksmith's establishment, I was told, contained sixty inmates who all sleep in one barn-like garret.

Our transatlantic cousins appear to be at sixes and sevens with their Chinese fellow-citizens, and to be anxious, by legislation, to roll back the unwelcome tide of "Mongolian invasion." A gentleman fresh from Queensland by the last Torres Straits mail tells me, over a Manilla and sherry-cobbler at Emerson's restaurant, that the northern portion of that colony is waxing wild at the steady increase of Chinese emigration, and that the rolling back theory is already mooted there. As Queensland is to be my future home, I naturally turn special attention to these folks whom, my Queensland friend assures me, it will be my duty as a good colonist, to regard as my future enemies, and endeavour to stamp out and improve off the face of the country. I peer and pry about everywhere; I cross-question magistrates, senators, high and low, the chiefs of the police, army men, and merchants, and never a word can I tempt them into saying against John Chinaman. As a Scotch resident, whose clerks, shopmen, and porters are all of that race, poetically put it to me,

"What the devil would Singapore be without the Chinese?"

You see, you must live with a man to know him; we have the authority of a most ancient proverb for that; and since the British residents of Singapore give the dreaded Mongolian

Digitized by Google

the best of testimonials of character, and my own observation does not kick against it in any manner or form, I shall withhold my opinion as to how far the hullabaloo against the Mongolian invasion is justified or not. Of course, I always expect to have to look after my pockets when I am in John Chinaman's company; I may regard theft as a sin, but he does not. It is simply a matter of education, and John in time must learn better, as he is learning, and will go on to learn.

The great houses of the European merchants—Scotchmen predominating in the ratio of five to seven—are confined to the central and best portion of Singapore, near which is "The Plain," a fine promenade, with cathedral and public buildings around, and a wide and well-shaded lower road parallel with and close to the beach. Here, in cool eventide, the fair European ladies take their drives in gharry, waggonette, or buggy, reclining languidly after their manner when once they deign to take wings to the East. Here the white robes and scarlet sashes of the Government House peons, and the pronounced colours of other great folk's liveries, flash amongst the green trees; here the young gentlemen of the place in spotless white trousers, gossamer morning coat, and solar topee, saunter and smoke their Manillas.

The wonderful markets, provision shops, and thickest centres of native population, are not far off, an inner harbour and canals full of broad-sterned sampans and sharp-prowed Malay proas penetrating into their very midst. You can buy almost anything you require at Singapore: costly goods at the European repositories, and odds and ends, chiefly Brummagem, at the petty Chinese stalls and shops. Native hawkers, their heads covered with large circular discs of straw-work, pointed on the outer centre like an ancient

Digitized by Google

shield, trot about, their wares suspended in baskets from a bamboo pole balanced over the shoulder. Sometimes it is pork for the Chinamen, or rice, or fish, or fruit, or compounds unmentionable, but apparently all fairly clean and appetising, thus offered for sale by street cries which, in an unknown tongue, have still a family resemblance to those we have been accustomed to in the well-beloved thoroughfares afar off.

Here comes a regular Chinese swell, a young placid-faced Flowery-lander, into whose pigtail has been woven scarlet silk, as a recognized hall-mark of gentility. He is attired in the wide loose trousers and wide loose smock characteristic of the clothes-wearing Chinaman in every quarter of the globe, but the materials are of exquisitely fine silk or cloth, and not the simple glazed stuff of the commonality. Moreover, his head is surmounted by a natty drab English deer-stalker, and his umbrella and fan are of dainty workmanship. Then we have a native policeman, a Malay, or more probably a Kling, in the blue uniform of "the force," leading by their pigtails a couple of handcuffed thieves, upon whom the scantily-robed shop people come out to look with that expression of sweet smiling innocence which is as characteristic of the Chinaman as are his pigtail and his queerly-placed eyes.

At night there are certain streets all ablaze with lamps—a kind of Oriental New Cut, where everybody sits on his haunches and takes life easy, giving or receiving the purchased banana, cocoa nut, mangosteen, pine-apple, durian, orange, betel nut, and leaf wrapper, with an air of supreme indifference on both sides. The durian is the fruit by which some Europeans swear, while others hate it with a bitter hatred. They say you have first to overcome the stench of the thing, and they say truly; a skunk is nothing to it. The

Digitized by Google

mangosteen is a delicious little fruit, confined to limited areas in the Malay Archipelago. It is round, the size of a small billiard ball, and a deep dead purple in colour. You cut through the hard rind, which is a third of an inch in thickness, and, pulling off half the cup, discover a white, firm, pulpy interior in five, six, or seven segments. This, removed by a fork, becomes a mouthful for an epicure. In a book I once read it is likened to a "blend" of strawberry and grape; but after much argument at dessert, one of us discovered that the mangosteen offers in one happy sensation the flavours of sweet-water grape, mulberry, jargonelle pear, and *bonâ fide* Johannisberg.

The natives eat bananas by the bushel. I bought three pine-apples, magnificent in weight as in flavour, for twopence half-penny; with three cents the thirsty coolie obtains a green cocoa nut, containing a pint and a half of refreshingly cool milk; and there are other fruits, all new to the European, too numerous to mention. Fish of grand size and quality are caught without much art or toil within half a mile of shore. You may pity these benighted barbarians, as it is the Christian Briton's duty to do; nevertheless, they appear to enjoy life very fairly, having few wants, and an abundance of good things dropping into their very mouths; no tailor's bills, no religious or educational difficulties, no votes, no superfluous furniture. The Chinaman certainly has to provide himself with a brace of chop-sticks, but they are inexpensive; the Malay does without even these.

It was very interesting to me to visit the gaol, under the guidance of one of the magistrates, and to see the prisoners printing in English, Chinese, and Malay, weaving blankets, making superb rattan wickerware, and working in the most orderly manner at all the common trades. A few were "in" for piracy, some for assault, the majority for theft. This

Digitized by Google

latter assertion, of course, is the same as saying that the majority are low-class Chinamen. Some of our good reformatory workers at home would have been gratified beyond measure at the excellent way in which the institution is conducted. The prisoners, up to the present time, have been housed—one might almost say caged—in common sheds and dormitories. Now, under the presence of pressure from without, the separate system is to be tried, and solitary cells are being built. The men, especially the Malays, are generally very tractable.

All being in chains, the prisoners move about with the old-fashioned clank-clank familiar to the present generation in England only on the melo-dramatic stage. Out of 620 prisoners there were only two women (not bad for a set of heathens), and the few prisoners in the European quarter were soldiers and sailors, who had been overtempted by the low grog shops (there are by far too many of these) into the commission of minor misdemeanours. Formerly there were not more than half a dozen European warders to manage this large prison, to which, perhaps, it should be mentioned, are brought long-sentence men from other portions of the Straits Settlements.

Last year there was an outbreak, and Mr. Dent, the superintendent, was murdered. The plot was, no doubt, hatched in the common dormitory, or in the gangs, and for a wonder the conspirators united sufficiently to effect their purpose, a fact to be noted when it is known that the Chinese and Malays have different languages of their own, and that the Chinese and Malays have no fervid love for each other. Many readers may dimly remember the story as briefly told in the English newspapers at the time, but I cannot call to mind that one particular incident was included in the account. I will give it for the benefit of the

Digitized by Google

author of any projected work on "The Brave Deeds of Women." Fame has been acquired by less worthy pretences.

For a while on the fatal evening it seemed as if the prisoners would overcome and, of course, massacre the authorities, and overrun the town. The final obstacle to their complete success was ultimately found in a corner of the prison area, defended by Mr. Lamb, an English, or rather Scotch, warder, who, throughout, behaved splendidly. He conceived and promptly put in action the bold idea of calling to his assistance and arming the handful of European prisoners under confinement in another part of the ground. The project answered thoroughly. Pending its execution, however, Mrs. Lamb undertook the defence of a certain central door, against which the howling mob of natives were concentrating all their fury and strength. The plucky woman seized a sword, and hacked and slashed at the naked feet and legs of the foe as often as they appeared through the space between the bottom of the door and the ground.

The breaking down of this barrier was expected every moment, but Mrs. Lamb never flinched from the post or relaxed her attacks, and the good woman's bravery gave her husband time to bring up his reinforcement. This manœuvre was so effectual that when the Brigade Major, who happened to be the senior military officer within call, on requisition from the Commissioner of Police hastened to the prison with what troops were then in Fort Canning, the disturbance was virtually over. More than a dozen prisoners had been shot down, and others were in custody, to be afterwards hanged or re-sentenced. The justices petitioned the Home Government to reward Mr. Lamb's services by a small annuity, but, so far as I could hear, no response has yet been sent out to this very reasonable suggestion. Of

Digitized by Google

course such an oversight at the Colonial Office (if the petition has not already been granted) is an accident. Anyhow, Lamb and his courageous wife were mainly instrumental in checking what might have been a most dangerous outbreak of murderous criminals.

The Botanical Gardens are situated at Tanglin, about three miles from Singapore, and the drive over a perfect road, with beautiful tropical scenery on either side, and here and there glimpses of jungle, is a treat no passing stranger should miss. The footprints of a tiger had been marked on the outskirts of the gardens on the morning of our visit, but such game is very rare now in the island.

The gardens owned by the Hon. Mr. Whampoa, the wealthy Chinese merchant recently invested with the order of St. Michael and St. George, should also be seen, both because of the rare plants and trees cultivated there and the quaint Chinese devices into which many of the shrubs had been clipped. The pretty orange-coloured flower, which so profusely covers the hedges everywhere, in perfume and formation somewhat resembling our heliotrope, is a common jungle flower.

Near the town, on your return from the gardens, look out for the Bengali washermen in the middle of the stream provided for them; you will then understand why your linen comes home so sadly perforated with unmendable holes. The small plantation of sugar-canes fringing the highway so prettily is evidence of the sweet tooth of the country; every other native you meet in the evening is munching his section of cane, for which he has paid some decimal portion of a farthing. As you drive to your quarters at night, the birds being silent and the lizards at rest, the insects are loud in concert in the hedges, gardens, and jungle; and the music may be heard high above the shrill rattle of the gharry. It

Digitized by Google

will be necessary to look carefully after your mosquito curtains, and to be at all times prepared for a really elegant little lizard running up the wall, or a brown-winged cockroach, not much less than two inches long, scampering across your dressing-table.

Digitized by Google

SIXTH ENTRY.

STRANGE FISH.

NEVER doubt there are very strange fish in the sea; stranger than any of which we have at present heard, read, or imagined. Allowing a wide margin—not a dot less than 50 per cent.—for travellers' tales, this is a conclusion forced upon a thoughtful observer thrown into the society of persons who live on the ocean. Whatever we may be provoked into saying in our haste, it is not true that all men are liars, and I have heard sufficient of late to lead me to believe that the extraordinary stories of what is hidden in the depths of the sea, in the quiet fathomless hollows never disturbed by the storms that agitate the upper world, are not so strange as might be told upon a plain statement of facts. Of beasts and birds there is probably known as much as it is possible to gather, but he would be a bold man who would say the same of fishes. When it was gravely stated (and I have just heard the full narrative, so called) that a stout ship was within the past three years pulled over and under by some many-armed devourer in the Indian Ocean, seamen wink and laugh; yet if you ask them whether they actually

Digitized by Google

deny the existence of the Great Sea Serpent, they confess that they nurse a half belief in the monster. Why should there not be such creatures? they demand. Verily, why not? If not very probable, this thing is, in their opinion, not at all impossible.

This paragraph I indited at Singapore, after a visit to the fish market at dawn one delicious morning. Something of the piscicultural wonders of the Malayan waters I had myself seen, watching the natives fishing from the wharves; much more I heard from a certain English youth in the town. He certainly drew the long bow with something of the genius of a Munchausen.

"Did you ever shoot an Argus pheasant?" I asked him, upon his telling me that he had often been at Mount Ophir, the notable summit which, though forty miles in the interior of the peninsula, is such a conspicuous object from the Malacca roadsteads, and which is famous for its rare birds and wonderful ferns.

"Lots of 'em," he readily answered. "But talking of pheasants," he broke off at a voluble tangent, "we were lying off the coast of Borneo one morning, and, by my word, I went ashore and shot two hundred and thirty birds before breakfast; two hundred and thirty, sir, besides seventeen deer."

Naturally (as if I thoroughly believed the statement) I remarked that this was sport, and no mistake.

"It was so," he modestly admitted. "I had three black boys loading guns for me, and when I got back to the boat my hands were so knocked to pieces that I could not pull an oar. The fellows on that account upset the boat."

"A good look-out for the sharks," I hinted.

"You talk of sharks! See, sir, I'll tell you what: I was once off the coast of West Australia, and we killed a shark.

Digitized by Google

I dare say you wont believe it now, but we got *a tun of pure oil out of the liver*—a tun, every drop of it. I'd never have believed it if I had not seen it myself."

In such a strain my eloquent countryman narrated his adventures, mingling with the romantic so much that appeared likely as to the Singapore fish market that I determined to explore it before the sun was up, and the fish either spoilt by the heat, or sold for breakfast consumption.

A morning drive in the tropics is delightful. The night has been close, and the mosquitoes (confound them!) numerous and warlike. In spite of the carefully-adjusted curtains some of these dreadful pests somehow contrive to reach you, and after worrying you by their shrill brazen trumpeting they seize the precise moment of your dropping asleep to make an attack in force. You have tossed restlessly, and perspired with amazing freedom; you have in the dark hours groaned and wished it were morning. Bath and coffee before daybreak, however, pull you together finely, and the early cheroot is a luxury indeed. Therefore you forgive, if you do not forget, the detested insects that have left their traces upon your wrists and forehead.

Early as you may rise there will be natives astir before you, and Europeans also taking their morning saunter before the sun has climbed high in the heavens. Vegetation is fresh with dew, and you can look abroad upon the world without the painful glare of a later hour. In lines, remembered not without mingled feelings of pleasure, Issac Watts, D.D., sets forth the profits and delights of early rising. These Malays and Chinese are of one mind with him. The little shops and bazaars are all open, and toiling back from the market, their copper-hued and oleaginous hides glistening in the young sunlight, come the itinerant vendors of fruit and fish. The man of means is followed by his "boy," bearing an

Digitized by Google

assortment of garden produce—fruits and vegetables mostly strange to Englishmen. In the grove singing birds (they are few in number, however), gaily answer each other's hymns of joy. The Malay children, in Nature's cheap garb, laugh and play with a vivacity very foreign to their natural gravity of demeanour. That indescribable smell, half-incense, half-sewage, peculiar to all oriental quarters, has not yet distilled in full offensiveness. A fresh invigorating breeze from the sea fans your face. Wherefore a morning drive in the tropics should be keenly enjoyed.

Though the Chinese coolies prefer their fish dried, and to our taste doubly high, there is a large consumption of fresh fish amongst the native population. The Singapore Billingsgate I accordingly found to be a lively and interesting place, and quite lacking the attributes which have made our great London fish market proverbial. These untutored people run a-muck occasionally, I presume, like other folks, but as a rule they are quiet and courteous to every one. The fish were carefully classified in heaps upon the wooden floor of the wholesomely-kept sheds.

The marketing housewife at home justly regards the lordly salmon and the delicious trout as the highest objects of fishmongering desire; at Singapore the best affection is bestowed upon sharks. In the shops in another portion of the town there were to be seen dried, cured, and pickled in a variety of ways, all manner of sharkish delicacies. Squatting on the edge of a gutter, and busily at work with chop-sticks, rice, and fish all hot, a number of natives watched with zest the cutting up of a hammer-headed shark, about four feeet long, which had just been landed, barely dead, from a sampan. The operator first smote the brute across the head with a keen-edged knife, to remove any doubt upon the question whether the ugly customer had

Digitized by Google

given up the ghost. Then he removed the fins, then cut out a few choice cutlets; at this stage a hungry-eyed Chinaman purchased quite a large slab, and bore it away in triumph. I had always imagined that this queer specimen of the shark genus was too tough and nasty for table purposes, but one has to unlearn many things in travelling. The real *bonne-bouche* seemed to be a very juvenile member of the white shark family. There were scores of them for sale, and those who could not afford to buy surveyed them with watering mouths.

Fourteen strange fish I could make nothing of. They were of all shapes, and frequently, even after death, of every colour of the rainbow. One fish was carp-shaped, and of a gamboge colour, weighing perhaps fourteen or fifteen pounds. Some were striped like zebras; one was tinted with the shades of the maiden-blush rose. I saw a fish that was almost square in shape; some that were all eyes, some all teeth. Spots carmine, spots orange, and spots blue and green jewelled the broad sides of others. Here lay a heap of silvery fry next of kin to our own whitebait; there a fish that a boy could scarcely carry. But somehow they were all, to my mind, suspicious in appearance, having nothing in common, so far as moral character goes, with the sheepish roach, gentlemanly grayling, cavalier trout, kingly salmon, or sportive dace of temperate climes. And after I had feasted my eyes upon the collection I went back to my gharry, very sad because of my own ignorance of the science which could have given these singular fish local habitations and names.

One afternoon a hideous Chinawoman, who used to angle every day with heavily-leaded line and stout brass wire hook, caught a great fish close to the shipping. It was an oval fish, something like a John Dory, but coated with fine gold, and it was a singular coincidence that I should there and

Digitized by Google

then recognize amongst the spectators a well-known official of the Bank of England, that very day arrived from home on his way to spend his holiday in Brisbane. I say it was a coincidence, for when I had last seen him he was conducting me through the treasure houses of Threadneedle Street, and tantalizing me with a sight of cart-loads of sovereigns and bales of bank-notes. Here we met by accident, thousands of miles from home, and we agreed that the old Chinawoman's fish was intended as a delicate reminder to him that the power of the precious metal, with which he had dealt until his hairs were grey, was simply world-wide.

Digitized by Google

SEVENTH ENTRY.

THE GREAT BARRIER REEF.

THE actual novelty of the Eastern and Australian Mail Steam Company's route to Australia begins in earnest after you have sailed from Singapore. In the matter of travel, of course, in these latter days, nothing remains novel long; the world cannot afford time now for old-fashioned nine days' wonders, nine hours or minutes being the utmost allowable limit. In a year or two, probably the "short sea route to Australia" will be better known than a hundred years ago was the highway from London to York. On our way to the antipodes we met with shoals of people, including the very old and very young of both sexes, who were putting a girdle round the globe without thinking anything of it. They were just taking a trip to Australia by the Torres Straits route, and a trip home again by way of Honolulu, San Francisco, Salt Lake City, Chicago, New York, and the mighty Atlantic, and it was the E. and A. Company they had to thank for making the girdle complete.

To Singapore you have a choice of routes. You may purchase a ticket at Charing Cross, and rush through Paris

Digitized by Google

and Marseilles, and take ship by the Messageries line, running between Corsica and Sardinia, calling at Naples, which you have plenty of time to explore; making for the Straits of Messina, so as to boast ever afterwards of a passing acquaintance with fiery Stromboli, and finding yourself, after six days of Mediterranean variety, at the mouth of the Suez Canal. Or you may work your way across Europe *viâ* Brindisi, and patronize the P. and O. Company, or adopt one or two humbler lines direct from London, such lines being in correspondence with the E. and A. Company's system. There is a fierce controversy amongst travellers as to which is the better class of steamers, that of the long-established P. and O., or that of the French company. Both have their advocates, but the most important point is that if you are prepared to pay your money you may take your choice, and that, travel how you may, Singapore must be your final changing place, and the Eastern and Australian Company's fleet your sole alternative.

The Torres Straits passage was, not so long ago, regarded as too fraught with deadly perils to be practicable; now it is thought little of except as a great improvement upon our communication with Australia, and a popular highway to the youngest, and, in the matter of resources, richest of the Australian colonies. The E. and A. Company has a fleet of admirably-appointed vessels, commanded by experienced navigators, who know how to thread their way through the wondrous Eastern Archipelago, amidst beautiful islands, now clothed with profuse vegetation, and now conspicuous by boldly-asserting mountain ranges and volcanic peaks. If the monsoon is favourable the course lies through the Straits of Rhio, the scenery of which is of the finest; then by the island of Banca, where the Chinese work the productive tin-mines for their Dutch owners; then along the coast

Digitized by Google

of Sumatra and Java. At first the E. and A. steamers called at Batavia, or Sourabaya; but they have for some time discontinued the practice. It did not pay; the explanation being really that which was once sent home from the Hague by an official who, setting all the red-tapeism of the diplomatic service at defiance, wrote as his despatch—

> "In matters of commerce, the fault of the Dutch,
> Is giving too little, and asking too much."

In these latitudes all the devices which the knowing ones have picked up in going to and fro on the earth, and walking up and down in it, are put in force, if haply artificial currents of air may be produced. The maids and matrons who have hitherto scandalized steady family people, like ourselves, by their flirtations—and on board ship many women somehow think they have a special license for this—are now so overcome by the muggy heat that they lie languidly about on the couches and chairs, thinking, let us hope, over their past delinquencies. No one challenges you now to deck-quoits, or the classic game of bull; the bores and the bounces, who are to be found in every large steamship, are nearly, if not altogether, extinguished, except in the morning, when, by the rules of the establishment, they may appear on deck in airy pyjama costume, and paddle about on the wet boards in bare feet. But, hot or cold, wet or dry, in thunder, lightning, or in rain, the propeller grinds on, and the Java Sea is succeeded by the Flores Sea and its islands. By turning through the Straits of Lombok, we, however, get southward of that long line of islands which begins at Acheen Head, includes Sumatra, Java, Bali, volcanic Lombok, Sumbawa, and Flores, and finishes only with the Timor Group.

So far as the close atmosphere will permit you to think,

Digitized by Google

now is the time to overhaul your Wallace, and make a note of the fact that the narrow straits separating the islands of Bali and Lombok constitute a mysterious band of division in the Eastern Archipelago, the one side representing Asia and its peculiarities, the other Australia and its peculiarities. Mr. Wallace, who is the best authority up to the present time upon the physical features of the Archipelago, argues that at no very distant period Java, Sumatra, and Borneo were part of the continent of Asia, but although Timor, the eastern link of the chain of islands, partakes of the appearance of Australia, he is confident that it never formed part of the Australian continent. Certain it is that the glimpses of Timor and the smaller islands which pass in review before you enter the Arafura Sea bespeak an altogether different world. In vain you look for the palms that hitherto have added variety to the island scenery; though in their stead you are frequently surprised by landscapes at a distance resembling genuine English park scenery.

Still steaming towards sunrise through water deepening and lessening in a remarkable manner, we put aside our literature of the Archipelago, and make ready for our introduction to the New World. The E. and A. company provides you before starting (if you inquire for it) with a voluminous hand-book of the voyage, and from it you may learn everything about those northern portions of Australia which are far beyond your ken, but which you may see by the eye of faith, and about which you may soon become learned by a judicious system of cram. I once heard Lord Palmerston tell of a man who was wont to say that what he didn't know would make an amazingly big book; and the anecdote may be not inaptly applied to what you do not see of that portion of South Australia which strangely enough lies to the northernmost verge of the continent. Let it suffice,

Digitized by Google

then, to know, that to-day we are seventy miles from Melville Island; that to-morrow, perhaps, we are opposite Port Essington, "proved to be notably the permanent abode of mosquitoes, malaria, and death," and not, therefore, a desirable spot for a summer picnic; that 220 miles due north are to be found the Aru Islands and their pearl fisheries; and that for the next 300 miles we are ploughing the head of the Gulf of Carpentaria. Just as town councils take uninteresting reports "as read," we, having nothing better to do, will take all this, and much more, for granted.

Booby Island, a square brown dome of rock, is, as a matter of fact, the first intimation we have that Australia is at hand—the land of anomalies, of wealth untold because undeveloped, of ardent hopes and strong desires; the land for an early glimpse of which we all strain expectant eyes. Once upon a time Booby Island was known amongst mariners as the Torres Straits Post Office, where there were no late and early deliveries, where prying postmistresses and sneaking postmasters never opened your letters, and where the postman's knock was never heard. In a cave which required neither padlock nor money-order office, passing ships would call for, or leave letters or provisions; the desolate crag is, however, now left to the undisputed possession of the birds from whom it derives its name, and the lonely port of Somerset, which they say is in its turn to be abandoned, does duty as a medium of communication or relief.

Considering all that we have heard and read of Australia, it is not surprising that our first glimpse is, if not prejudiced, at least biassed. Prince of Wales Island we pass at close quarters, admiring as we go its grassy highlands, green glades, and dense forests. At our elbow are a couple of returning colonials, who warn us that the first view of the mainland will not be half so inviting; that, in short, Australian scenery

Digitized by Google

is monotonous. One of these gentlemen, who has made his fortune in Queensland, goes so far as to say that if we have come hither for romantic scenery, we have come to the wrong shop. That is how he puts it. But his attempt to prejudice the strangers fails, for they had already discovered that he had not a soul above hides and tallow. His companion, living up to his privileges as a son-in-law, told him he was a noodle, and told us that if we had an eye for the beautiful, Queensland would amply gratify it. They have both dwelt long in the land; which are we to believe? The information vouchsafed touching the first glimpse of the mainland was undeniably true. When the almost impalpable cloud on the horizon became a distinct "loom of the land," and Australia was visibly though indistinctly before us, there stole over the mind a general impression of sterility and monotony. Then the man of hides and tallow was, after all, in the right!

But, patience. By-and-by the indistinct line of hills becomes a succession of billows of upheaved land, rising sometimes into sharp peaks. Closer in you may notice that there are trees, but trees struggling as if for bare life. At last, the sober grey prospect develops into an expanse of woodland that is just a little monotonous. This is our first acquaintance with the famous gum-trees of Australia. It is autumn, but autumn without the radiant reds, umbers, yellows, and browns that glorify decay in the English copse. So that things are not so bad as they seem. We must make allowance for the time of the year, though St. Patrick's Day, to be sure, is a strange period of the year to offer an apology on the score of autumnal advance. The country, too, as we learn later, has been suffering from one of the too often recurring droughts.

A nearer acquaintance teaches us how unjust it is to rush

Digitized by Google

to hasty conclusions. The scenery, if not grand, is pretty; if there are no forests there are patches of picturesque woodland and shadings of grassy dell. Ant-hills, neatly fashioned as obelisks reared by human hands, rise ruddy-brown on the hill sides. On the shore line, strips of clean, hard yellow sand alternate with dark rocks, honeycombed by the wear and tear of time.

Somerset, the first Australian port of call, comes upon you suddenly from behind a point on Albany Island. By the time these lines are reproduced in England, Somerset will, in all probability, be disestablished and disendowed, for Thursday Island passage, a little to the north, has been for various reasons preferred before it as a Government depôt and a port of call for the mail steamers. Somerset, though to our eyes the cove is extremely pretty, and the sight of houses amongst trees welcome, is said to be a dreary place at the best—sterile, deserted, exposed. The pearl fishermen call there for stores, and they are a rude race. I believe there are not a dozen houses in the whole township, and the inhabitants are sometimes on absolutely short commons in the matter of food. On the day of our arrival a great event had happened—a boy had shot a wallaby and brought it in for a feast. The day previously a carpet snake twelve feet long had been destroyed near one of the verandahs. The aborigines in the bush are, as they always have been in this part of the colony, a constant source of trouble and an occasional source of danger. On the whole, therefore, you may find better places of residence than this Somerset: but it was not without interest to me, who had read De Beauvoir's book, and been informed how that clever Frenchman had been treated very hospitably at the place, and had partaken very freely of a collation of marvellous stories dished up out of sheer devilry by some of the people with whom he had

Digitized by Google

come into contact; who had also read of that plucky overland exploration of the brothers Jardine, which solved the hitherto undecided question as to the course of certain rivers which emptied themselves into the Gulf of Carpentaria, and of the elder Jardine's settlement at Cape York, where he had through weary months to hold his own against the dangers that walk at noonday and the arrows that fly in darkness.

Somerset harbour we entered in the midst of a tropical storm that made the little pearl-shelling vessels rock like paper boats. We remained long enough to learn something of this same pearl-fishery. One informant proved that it is a most thriving business, and deplored that, by some astonishing oversight, the Queenslanders allow the entire profit of the enterprise to go to another colony. Nearly the whole of the boats hail from Sydney, some of whose merchants are making rapid fortunes out of the trade, upon which, added my complainant, there is no tax; not even a boat license, he says, is imposed by the Government of Queensland. The vessels engaged in the business are smart little fore-and-aft schooners, and last year there were taken from the port of Somerset not less than 200 tons of pearl-shells, the selling price of which would be about £200 per ton. One firm in Sydney received seventy-two tons, and I heard of one Birmingham house that had already bought £30,000 worth of the material.

As it often happens with other important industries by which large fortunes are made in a short time, the pearl shelling capabilities of Queensland were discovered by accident. The hardy seamen and native divers engaged in the *beche-de-mer* trade, about four years ago, brought up an occasional pearl oyster, and as the matter was talked about in the straits it was remembered that the blacks along the

Digitized by Google

coast were in the habit of wearing crescent-shaped pearl-shell ornaments about their necks. The industry was then organized, and with the most gratifying pecuniary results.

The pearl oyster averages from seven to nine inches in diameter, and the inside is lined with a beautiful coat of the mother of pearl, from which buttons and other articles are made. At Somerset I was presented with a pair that, mounted, make capital card trays, being fully eight inches across. The people engaged in pearl diving seem to be a very miscellaneous set. The white men are mostly big, rough-bearded fellows, some of whom would not thank you for inquiring too closely into their antecedents, and who adopt a remarkably "conciliating" way of dealing with their coloured assistants. Very often in Australia you hear that the blacks of a certain district have been conciliated—that is to say, knocked down or shot. But it is only a very few aboriginals who work at the pearl fishery, or indeed any other steady pursuit. When the coasting steamers pass between the mainland and one of the more southern islands off the Queensland coast, the passengers are sometimes puzzled to account for the black balls bobbing up and down on the waves. The explanation is that they are natives swimming off from the island to board the boat and beg a passage to one of these northern ports. Three or four may contrive to catch the rope that is thrown astern; the remainder return to shore, swimming, as before, the entire distance of four or five miles. Some of the fortunate ones are amongst the aboriginals to be found in Torres Straits amongst the pearl fishers. The South Sea Islanders, however, or Kanakas, as it is the fashion to call them, make the best divers. In some of the boats may be found natives of the islands around New Guinea, gentlemen who, if report does not belie them, are not, at their own domestic hearths,

Digitized by Google

insensible to the attractions of nicely-cooked human flesh.

At Somerset I had the pleasure of meeting the Rev. Mr. Macfarlane, of the London Missionary Society. He is a missionary; he is also an explorer; and if ever we are to know much about New Guinea I believe it will be from him. Riding at her anchor in the sandy cove was his little steamer, the Ellangowan, presented to his mission by Miss Baxter, of Dundee, and sent out for the express purpose of civilizing the Papuan savages. In his last trip to New Guinea Mr. Macfarlane and his party were attacked by the natives, who, though probably they had never before seen a ship, much less a steamer, in their river, rushed into the water, and, with incredible fury, hurled their spears and launched their arrows at the exploring party.

Periodically, Mr. Macfarlane steams round to visit the native teachers he has planted here and there, to leave them supplies and give encouragement. The big-booted pearl shellers have all a kind word to say of this devoted gentleman, whose burly form and open countenance are of more consequence to them, I expect, than his clerical position.

"Mr. Macfarlane is the missionary, is he not?" I asked a man who boarded the steamer.

"Dunno about that," the fellow replied, "but by G— he's a man every inch of him."

I can answer for it there was one passenger on board the R.M. steamer who, amidst the rude tempest which ushered us into the next phase of the voyage, wished Mr. Macfarlane and his pretty little mission steamer a hearty "God-speed."

That next phase of our voyage was the Great Barrier Reef of Australia. Roughly speaking this is a wall of coral reefs extending some 1300 miles, from the coast of New Guinea dnwn to the shores of Queensland, and running so parallel

Digitized by Google

with the land that its shortest distance is ten, and farthest 120 miles from shore. The ocean outside may be moaning and bursting, but within the Barrier all is comparatively calm. The channel is mostly shallow, but it varies in the most extraordinary manner. Sometimes close to the wall of the reef there is a sheer depth of sixty fathoms; then the water shoals suddenly away. No wonder that the steamers adopt the precaution of anchoring after nightfall, unless the moon is up.

Every day now brings its new subject of interest. The Barrier Reef shows above the sea at irregular intervals, now black and low, now as an undefined something that, just beneath the surface, night and day angers the water into foam. A trusty pilot comes on board at Somerset, not to leave the vessel until the reef is past. We are always within sight of Queensland, and at each stopping place we hear from the new arrivals more and more of the wonderful riches of this colony, which stretches from close to the equator, with a seaboard of 2250 miles, and teems with capabilities that cry aloud for development.

Birds from the land come out to criticise the sea-fowl, never venturing, however, farther than the reefs, which in the surf look like black pillows bordered with white lace. Blue smoke ascending from the edges of the forests indicate the camp fires of the natives, and sets the "colonials," who gather as the voyage goes on, discussing, not the virtues, alas! but the ineradicable vices of the race. We have not proceeded a hundred miles down the reef passage before we are aware that it is not the fashion here to think or speak anything good of the Australian aboriginal. The only anxiety I could discover was that he and his should die out as quickly as possible. All efforts to make something of him seem to have failed. Reclaimed for a time, he

Digitized by Google

sooner or later wanders stealthily back to his tribe. Miserable wanderers they have been, are, and apparently must be.

A chart is positively a romance of the sea, if studied aright. It tells of adventurous mariners pushing their way along an unknown coast line, amidst ever-recurring obstacles and terrors, real and suggested. The names of the Queensland bays and headlands, which we spell out in the chart-room, were, we may be sure, given with a meaning. In these days the mariner heads south with the confidence which a rich harvest of science warrants. How fared the intrepid pioneer who sowed the seed? Here, upon the outspread sheet, we have the fruit of such inscriptions as "numerous reefs divided by narrow deep channels;" or "safe entrance here;" or "heavy confused sea," or "sand-bank slightly vegetated;" or "submerged rocks." Wreck Bay lies yonder; here Cape Flattery; there Cape Direction. There is Mount Cook at the entrance of Endeavour River, where the gallant Captain Cook careened his ships on the southern bank while he climbed the granite mass called Lizard Island to spy out an avenue of escape from the network of channels in which he had become involved.

The district is busy enough now, for beyond the mountains are the famous Palmer gold fields, and, beyond them, so the newcomers rumour, a brand new gold field, to which people are rushing at the present moment. Cooktown accordingly sprung up almost, as one may say, in a night, as indeed townships frequently do in this vast new country. The harbour is good, but not deep enough to admit close to shore a ship of large tonnage; but we can make out the square, low, white houses, and the verandah running round as many sides as the owner can afford, and can discern that all the buildings are of wood, with roofs of shingle. Thoroughly Australian is the aspect, and thoroughly homely.

Digitized by Google

Cooktown occupies a fine situation. Its bold hills are diversified by great ribs covered with a brownish grass, by ravines full of green undergrowth, by peaks and pyramids verdure clad, by ridges capped with rocky crowns of fantastic pattern. There is one hill which would appear to have had an eruption of Brobdingnagian beehives breaking out all over its face. One of the bystanders says that the scenery about Cooktown is not amiss, but that it has an unfinished sort of look, as if it had been created late on the sixth day. This is not reverent, but it hits the case pretty fairly, and there are other portions of the coast that come under the same category. The scattered township looks pleasant from seaward, but an inhabitant recommends me not to bring my family up there for a holiday.

Next day we have more significant nomenclature. We pass Weary Bay; also Cape Tribulation, the latter a low mound flanked by finely-wooded slopes. Peter Botte mountain is over 3000 feet high, but in association with a far-reaching range it does not look so lofty. Towards evening these imposing mountains are magnificently purpled with a purple that is peculiar to Australia. It suffuses mountains, valleys, and islands alike, save where cloudlets rest like silver epaulettes upon the shoulders of some obtrusive summit. It is the land of gold beyond, but there is no other attraction apparent. The coveted treasure is wrung amidst burning heat and chronic privations from the bosom of the very desert.

There is an abundance of mountain grandeur down the entire coast of Queensland, with islands and narrow water passages charmingly picturesque in their variety of foliage. There are curiosities, too, such as Magnetic Island, which seems to have passed, at some remote period, through a terrible fiery ordeal. One of its headlands is covered with

Digitized by Google

square boulders, resembling the old-fashioned tombs of a country churchyard. Leafless trees stand weird as gibbets on the higher peaks. There is a bay which reminded me much of the Giant's Causeway—not the first time I had been led involuntarily to think of Northern Ireland or Western Scotland. The Orchard Rocks are a singular group of gigantic boulders, so poised that you might imagine the weight of a finch or sparrow would overbalance and send them thundering into the sea. One pillar upon this island is thirty feet high, and as perfectly cubed as if wrought by mathematical skill; and there is a *fac-simile* of ancient ruins at the extremity of the hard sanded beach of a delightful bay.

We have now voyaged about 600 miles down the coast, and, of course, 600 miles of any kind of scenery would begin to be monotonous somewhere about the five hundreth mile; yet if that travelling photographer I spoke of in a previous chapter should pass that way he might bag a series of very striking views. By-and-by comes Townsville, finely situated under a big hill sparsely wooded at the base and displaying, as its upper half, masses of red rock curiously seamed and wrinkled. Cleveland Bay looks bright with its long clear stretch of sand, and with houses dotted here and there, with a good deal of intervening space; while upon the lowest terrace of the craggy steep, itself a fair hill, there are other houses—white-roofed bungalows, each with its inevitable verandah. The steamer anchors here some two miles from shore. At Cooktown we approach much nearer land.

What the coast scenery of Bowen might be we could only gather from hearsay, since we halt off the bay at midnight in blackness and rain, but we make up for our disappointment by hugely enjoying the charms of the Whitsunday Passage.

Digitized by Google

Unfortunately, large vessels cannot call at the various ports that are opening up on the Queensland coast, and we have to communicate with shore by small paddle-wheel boats, some of which would be highly successful in an exhibition of monstrosities of naval architecture. A gentleman comes aboard from Townsville—the outlet for a fine group of gold fields—and he tells us in confidence that Townsville is the finest town in Queensland. A gentleman from Bowen sings precisely the same song of his town. Mentioning these things to a Rockhamptonian later on, he assures me Bowen is a village, and Townsville a mere collection of shanties; but that Rockhampton really ought to be the metropolis of the colony, and will be when the round pegs are inserted in round holes, etc., etc. My friend's *pièce de resistance* was the argument that Rockhampton boasted two daily newspapers; *ergo*, it must be a place of consideration. From whatever point he started, he came back naturally to the daily newspapers. He told me of the Fitzroy, and of many creeks with singular names, of schools of arts, hospitals, and churches, but sooner or later he wound up with his daily newspapers. Even when he appalled my timid nerves with his stories of the fearful alligators which abound in the Fitzroy it was the same; it was just as I expected—copies of *The Rockhampton Bulletin* and *Argus* were found amongst the cartload of marine stores taken from one saurian stomach. Of course when a Maryborough patriot appeared, I innocently asked him how far behind the other ports Maryborough was, and of course I at once found that Rockhampton, Bowen, and the rest were simple frauds; the real Queensland port was Maryborough.

Moreton Bay at last! The white sand of Moreton and the woods of Stradbroke are before us as the chain cable gallops through the hawsehole, and the Government steamer

Digitized by Google

ranges alongside to tranship the mails and passengers. I dip my pen to make the last entry in my Log. The voyage is over, and the voyagers are glad. New scenes are before them. As they enter the Brisbane River they become aware that they have turned over, for weal or woe, a new page in the Log of their life. Somehow, the kind welcomes they have received have made them feel already at home, even before they have placed foot on land. They had read of Moreton Bay scenery as consisting of mangrove flats, swamps, and numberless mud banks; had, in truth, been led to form a dismal anticipation of it, of the river, and of the town. In all they are agreeable surprised.

Two emigrant ships, recently arrived from England, lie at anchor in the bay; one, we are told, under quarantine, the men, women, and children, perhaps, gazing wistfully at the land which, as yet, they are forbidden to enter. What do they think of the prospect? It must be a doubly serious matter to poor folks who have come out so far to begin life again with all their kith and kin. Thanks to a kind Providence which is too wise to err, too good to be unkind, the flower of hope may droop, but it never absolutely scorches up while there is the sap of life to sustain it. The very vastness of the unbroken forests which cover the land is calculated to inspire them with awe; and, doubtless, while the immigrants wait in anxiety for release by the Health Officer, fears and hopes alternate. As the *Kate* steams up the Brisbane River I try to look around from their standpoint, putting myself, as it were, in their place.

The Brisbane is a broad stream that bends and twists through a variety of scenery, and is skirted with a verdant fringe of mangrove almost to low-water mark. It introduces the stranger to the smooth ash-coloured trunks and scantily-leaved branches of the tall gum trees that shed their bark

Digitized by Google

instead of their leaves, and which are never, therefore, without some sort of foliage. At one turn these woods appear covering the slopes of mountainous country, not with the April greens or October colourings of home, but with a prevailing greyness which soon becomes familiar, and in time uninteresting. The clearings, however, will most attract the immigrant's attention, for it is from them that they receive their first inkling of Australian life. After three months of sea and sky it will be pleasant to look out upon green pastures, and see once more cattle and horses grazing in close proximity to the dwelling-houses of man. The newly-arrived immigrants wonder why in the meadows, as they have been used to call them, there are so many stumps of trees, cut off a yard or so from the ground; but they soon learn that this is how new homes are made, and that the prostrate logs and charred trunks from which arises thin blue smoke, mark the determination of some settler to cut down and burn until he has cleared himself a space in the Bush for pasture and homestead. The immigrant begins even thus early to perceive that in the sweat of his brow lies his chance in the future. He perceives that rough and strong posts and rails replace the sweet-scented hedgerows of the shires; that here there are immensity of space and freedom to roam at will; that though a settler may live in a tiny slab-hut, with roof of bark or shingle, he looks as happy as a king, with his children playing about, and with the consciousness that though his estate be uncultivate and wild, it is his own to make or mar.

Nearer town the scene becomes less primitive. Groups of bananas, patches of maize, lucerne, sugar, and clumps of feathery bamboo around the larger dwellings of well-to-do colonists, are visible amongst numerous other evidences of industrial pursuits. Then come the suburbs of Brisbane—

Digitized by Google

cool, picturesque-looking villas, wood-built, protected from the glare and heat by broad verandahs, and surmounting high-wooded eminences; clusters of neat cottages, houses great and small, overlooking the river; and, finally, having rounded a sharp tongue of land, the busy wharves, warehouses, churches, and shipping, burst into view. Upon hills, right and left, the city of Brisbane stands revealed, charmingly situated, but as yet in its infancy, though an infancy which any one may see at a glance is lusty and rapid in its progression to maturity; Government House, standing in ample grounds, the Botanical Gardens, full of strange tropical trees and plants, and the Parliamentary Buildings, with their conspicuous centre dome, appear in succession as the steamboat sweeps round yet another sharp curve and makes for the wharf at which, bag and baggage, we land, to begin our practical experience of the antipodes.

PRINTED AT THE CAXTON PRESS, BECCLES.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google